

The Perceived Public Accountability among Malaysian Public Administrators: A Validity Test through Confirmatory Factor Analysis

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Abstract

Accountability is strongly emphasised in the public sector, recognised as a list of duties implemented in meeting needs and wants of the people. In this study, public accountability examined as roles of public employees divided into internal and external accountability persists to provide the exact representation of the actual role of employees in the public sector. The dichotomy provides an unprofound sense of what responsibilities are, especially within the Malaysian public sector. As such, this study was conducted among public administrators and items analysed through confirmatory factor analysis, and a final of 13 item-measurement construct validated. The findings show that internal and external accountability recognised as routine roles, which is placed under different ministries and efforts to strengthen public administrators' skills in the implementation of these tasks, can avoid any form of misconduct that could impair their work performance. The theoretical and methodological issues in relation to public accountability constructs are discussed in light of these findings.

Keywords: Accountability, internal accountability, external accountability, public sector

1. Introduction

Public accountability stems from the awareness on part of the government and public organization as the need for a comprehensive understanding of how public employees can deliver duties effectively. Pesch (2008) defined public as 'public goods' and 'public interest'. Public goods refer to the list of goods and services offered by the government to the public at the reasonable price, including both the traditional and non-traditional functions of the government; economic management, social welfare and innovation. While public interest is where the goods and services are worthwhile, accessible and of high quality (Court, 2004; Siddiquee, 2010). Therefore public accountability is an obligation undertaken by the public sector through agencies and individual's appointed in offering public goods for the interests of the people as the main consumers, and employees are given compensation or payment for undertaking the responsibilities. Public accountability was found able to develop organisational distinctiveness and responsiveness in meeting wide-ranging government objectives (Acar & Robertson, 2004).

Past literature indicates a variety of accountability explanations; it has stated the principles, phase and cycle. For principles, it requires the employees to adhere to the set of principles including transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, openness, ethics, responsiveness, fairness and robustness (Crowe, 2011). These principles have also identified a set of values and work ethics outlined and upheld by public employees. Public employees need to understand that there are appointed to serve the public in a responsible manner and integrity, and contributed to a

distinct culture in the public sector. In this case, public accountability requires the culture of obedience so that community problems can be resolved immediately, without cultural and religious differences. Accountability is core, in the implementation of responsibilities in a multi-racial society in Malaysia.

While the phase concept of accountability explaining a series of responsibilities performed which start from assessing the needs and expectation of people, and end with the evaluation and modification, for cost-effectiveness and efficiency in delivering public goods. Acar and friends have successfully identified that there were five steps involve including mapping and manifesting expectations, mobilising and motivating (ex-ante), monitoring and measuring progress and performance, then modifying, and mobilising and motivating (ex-post) (Acar, Guo, & Yang, 2008). In meeting national goals for economic and social stability, plans made in the form of short-term and long-term programs, as well as national policies, take into account the implementation of these five processes. This process allows evaluation and assessment to be made primarily, costs and benefits before approval granted.

However, many have emphasised a series of roles and responsibilities executed or known as multiple accountabilities. These responsibilities divided into objective and subjective responsibilities, instrumental and expressive responsibilities, downward and upward responsibilities and finally, internal and external accountability, yet provided a complete spectrum of public accountability (Dicke, 2002; Kearns, 1994). Internal and external accountability as accordance to Romzek and Dubnick (1987), contained the complete direction of individual roles in the public sector, which indicates that employees are required to identify, understand and perform duties which related to the objectives of public organisations. External accountability is unique for establishing external relationship including other clients, local community, independent bodies, and any other public and private institutions. While internal accountability is focusing on internally task focus that assists the organisation in sustaining good performance and relationship with the involved parties. The internal and external accountability persist in providing an accurate representation of the actual role of public employees. This dichotomy provides an un-profound sense of what responsibilities are and inferred from the literature (Haque, 2000; Mattei, 2007). As such, this study aims to identify items for the latent construct of external and internal accountability in explaining public accountability within the context of the Malaysian public sector.

2. Research Methodology

In this study, a cross-sectional survey distributed to public administrators. Public administrators were selected due to their unique role under external and internal accountability. The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the past study. External (9 items) and internal (8 items) accountability questionnaires derived from Kim and Lee (2009), and the response rates were measured using Five-Point Likert Scale including 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Often) and 4 (Very Often). In this study, 410 questionnaires returned and used in the final analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

3. Results

The study indicates that the high response rate obtained from the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (41%). For the age group, most of the respondents belonged to 31-40 years old

(59%). The distribution of gender was higher for female respondents (64%). As for marital status, married respondents (78%) formed the largest group. Majority of the respondents were Muslim (95%) and held a Bachelor Degree (62%). The overall mean value recorded for external accountability was 2.86, while internal accountability achieved higher 3.36 mean value. The findings indicated that respondents agreed that both roles considered as routine jobs performed, however by referring to the individual items mean value, few of these tasks were implemented intermittently, specified in the organisational context. The initial results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicates that the models have not achieved the recommended value of goodness-of-fit indices. Findings indicate that some of the items have low factor loadings, suggesting the items did not achieve uni-dimensionality validity and not correlated with the constructs. As such few items deleted, and the model was re-specified through factor correlation, to improve its fitness. The results of the re-specified model (Table 1) denotes an improvement in the goodness-of-fit indices and a better fit to the data. Results indicated that the absolute fit measures; GFI, RMSEA, incremental fit measures; NFI, CFI, TLI, and parsimonious fit measure; Cmin/df exceeded the recommended value. As such the measures have attained convergent validity and construct validity, and accepted as roles frequently performed by public administrators.

Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	χ^2	χ^2/df	P	NFI	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
External Accountability	7.193	1.798	0.126	0.993	0.994	0.989	0.997	0.044
Internal Accountability	16.143	1.794	0.064	0.994	0.989	0.994	0.998	0.044

Table 2 displays the magnitude, direction and statistical significance of the estimated parameters between the latent variables and their indicators, and used to examine convergent validity. The findings indicate that the magnitude of all the variables and their indicators are above the reasonable loadings (Standard Regression Weight ≥ 0.5). The estimated parameters were also in the same direction. The critical ratio (C.R) exceeded the benchmark of ± 1.96 which are statistically significant.

Table 2: The Magnitude, Direction and Statistical Significance of the Estimated Parameters between Latent Variables and their Indicators

Indicator		LV	SRW	S.E	C.R	P
External Accountability (EA)						
EA1 Maintaining annual contract with the State	←	EA	0.532			
EA3 Obtaining accreditation from an external auditing agency	←	EA	0.528	0.089	10.650	***
EA6 Responsiveness to clients' performance expectations	←	EA	0.517	0.079	7.469	***
EA7 Working with community members in shaping policy	←	EA	0.709	0.119	8.504	***
EA8 Working with advocacy groups in shaping policies	←	EA	0.775	0.133	8.117	***
EA9 Maintaining a good relationship with the local media	←	EA	0.796	0.158	9.002	***
Internal Accountability (IA)						
IA10 Increasing work productivity	←	IA	0.891			
IA11 Following management direction	←	IA	0.847	0.035	27.584	***
IA12 Following administrative procedures	←	IA	0.870	0.041	24.793	***
IA13 Helping people in need	←	IA	0.821	0.041	21.899	***
IA14 Dedication to the mission of the agency	←	IA	0.859	0.039	23.602	***
IA15 Observing the agency ethics policy in providing services to the clients	←	IA	0.829	0.041	22.400	***
IA17 Improving the quality of services and best practices	←	IA	0.810	0.040	21.492	***

4. Discussion

Past studies showed that accountability arises from the different responsibility held by public employees. The two primary responsibilities; external and internal accountability premised on four primary responsibilities identified by Johnson and Dubnick as cited by Kim and Lee (2009). The framework successfully identified the duties performed by public managers within the context of the public organisation in Malaysia. The framework contained the actual work done in public organisations, which were also identified by other scholars (Dose & Klimoski, 1995; Mattei, 2007). The finding indicates that these are regular roles. However, it may also intermittently performed as seasonal roles.

External accountability prescribed the roles of public administrators in creating economic and social stability. In meeting national objectives, employees are required to perform roles through partnership, joint activities, collaboration and networking with local, international and pioneering agencies (Haque, 2000; Mattei, 2007). The execution of external accountability, allowing the public agency to find, evaluate, and implement new approaches in renewing national priority areas including education, health, and housing through external partnership and the right legal framework. Furthermore, the roles were also requiring the public administrators to be responsive to other emergent issues happened at the local and international level, including war and natural disasters which affecting Malaysian citizens and the global community, allowing them to give help and assistance.

Besides external accountability, it is also justifiable that internal accountability highlighted as routine and recurring work activities. The presence of internal accountability complemented the total role of public administrators and was equally important. This jobs contained two main responsibilities including hierarchical and professional accountability. Hierarchical accountability streamed into adherence to sets of guidelines, procedures and ethical policy for productivity and career enhancement. While professionalism is referring to individual belief in self-regulation, dedication to profession and demand for autonomy which could minimise any form of direct oversight through positive attitude and behaviour (Dose & Klimoski, 1995; Nik Hazimah Nik Mat & Zaharul Nizal Zabidi, 2010).

External and internal contained both objective and subjective responsibilities. These roles focused on core activities, and simultaneously focusing on citizenship behaviour through continuance assistance provided to the needy specifically to the person within. Objective accountability defined as fixed accountability and responsibilities associated with one's position. Employees need to be highly committed, which concern on quantity and quality of output, and time parameters (Bertelli & Lynn, 2003). Employees are strictly monitored, observed and performed within the resource constraints. While subjective responsibilities are also known as relative responsibilities which can be explained through Stewardship Theory. In this context, public employees involved in performing community service, integrity, and charity works, which add value to the employees' roles.

These responsibilities are also indicating the direction of accountability which includes downward and upward accountability. In this case, public employees need to ensure the achievement of government goals, and satisfaction among the public. Public accountability identified as instrumental and expressive responsibilities. Instrumental accountability deals with resource seeking, service delivery, and social entrepreneurship. Whereas expressive accountability concern with the inclusion of desired values and beliefs in roles implementation.

These roles require the employees to meet the needs of people and government as the resource providers, and also fulfilling the needs of the community, and organisational members. Downward accountability observed as being responsiveness to the partners, employees, and supporters. While upwards accountability concern with trustees including the government and the public (Bertelli & Lynn, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004).

Directly, tasks implemented were also concern on a set of principles that guide individual action and behaviour and following the process in place. As the mediator between the public and the government, public employees ensure progress and achievements were updated and reported. Furthermore, public employees act as guardians of government property, need to use them transparently and integrity. They are also the implementers of the people's aspirations, and necessarily need to be compassionate and affectionate to carry out their responsibilities (Crowe, 2011).

This study has successfully examined the roles of public administrators, within the Malaysian context, and to strengthen individual ability to perform, it is essential that any training program conducted could directly strengthen individual skills, knowledge, and abilities for successful task performance. However, the use of cross-sectional survey has been problematic, which may result in overstatement, and leading to an erroneous conclusion (Zainudin Awang, 2012). The implementation of internal and external accountability subjected to environmental change and pressure. The external changes causing further instability which requiring the public organisation to reassess their operational side, which directly affecting employees' task content, including both external and internal accountability. As such, collecting data from multiples sources including interview can validate the results obtained.

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully identified the roles of public administrators in Malaysia. These two dichotomies provide an additional advantage to the Malaysian public sectors as public employees concern on roles effectiveness and efficiency as they are accountable and answerable to broader constituents. Consequently, it guides the selection of behaviour, ensuring that the national resources used wisely, and public goods delivered ethically. Services and goods can be directed to the right recipients with no oversight, as they believe that the public sector environment is open for assessment, and employees strictly observed. Furthermore, the success of task implementation is directly concern with the achievement of national agenda, which contained under the government five years planning and others long-term plan which is deemed necessary for the balanced development of the nation. The government believes that public employees are the actors and implementers of the national programme and its importance for them to guide their behaviour in fulfilling the national aspiration.

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