

# A Qualitative Exploration: Tenants of Green Office Building in Kuala Lumpur

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## ABSTRACT

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*It has been suggested that selecting the building that is perceived by the market may not be the ultimate factor in the office location decision. The green features were previously categorized as an important consideration for office occupation decision-making. This study seeks the understanding and reason*

*behind tenants' choice in adding up value to their business in Kuala Lumpur. Tenants' decisions are based on the post-occupancy of the tenancy in a green office building. In this paper, we identify factors' influencing tenants to occupy green office buildings using a mixed industry of in-depth interviews in Kuala Lumpur. The interview reveals the factors the tenants consider when choosing a green office building and further explores the qualitative reasons for those choices. Tenants' preferences were displayed as locational behaviour, including the building features, cost, image, and branding. This research revealed the thirteen tenants using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The study identifies the factors that are influenced by the company's profile. This in-depth interview will provide the foundation of a future comprehensive survey of office tenants on their choices of green office buildings.*

**Keywords:** Green office building, behavioral, qualitative

## INTRODUCTION

Kuala Lumpur has seen the development of many office buildings in recent years. The current supply of space has shown an increase in office space percentage over the past year. The total office space from available office buildings in Kuala Lumpur amounts to 9.8 million square meters (NAPIC, 2021). Being the commercial center of Malaysia, it has the majority of large corporate head offices occupying top-grade office buildings in Kuala Lumpur; being the capital city of Malaysia. With the growing number of office buildings, there is a trend toward the development and construction of green office buildings. In response to the growing movement towards sustainability, green building rating tools were developed worldwide, and Malaysia has also undertaken to develop several tools. Among the tools, Green Building Index (GBI) was introduced in 2009. It provides guidelines for the development and rating of green buildings in Malaysia.

As of 2022, there are currently thirty-four (34) official green-rated commercial purpose-built office buildings (either built as GBI-rated or other ratings) within the Klang Valley area. Most of these rated buildings are acknowledged as generally being the most advanced buildings that have been designed to incorporate several "sustainable" features. It has been noted that the sustainable and green concept comes from the sustainability development concepts. The green-rated rating includes GBI (Malaysia), LEED (USA), BREEAM (UK), and GreenStar (Singapore). Every rating has a different dimension in covering sustainability issues. A study in Pakistan reflects on the cultural and governmental issues that are not considered in the tool by Khan et. al (2021).

From the study conducted by Deborah and Gemma (2013), the importance of each of these factors tends to be influenced by the size and type of companies as well as the availability of suitable buildings in the market. Factors of this study found that the ultimate driving factor is an emphasis on another

factor which includes micro-location factors such as accessibility, and location of the building (Deborah and Gemma, 2013). A study in Malaysia by Mohd Adnan et al. (2022) stated that business located in a green office building is influenced by the location of the building and other micro factors. and that This research intends to reinforce the finding that companies generally seek accommodations concerning office space that can "add value" to their specific business, especially in the Kuala Lumpur area. The added value such as image and branding towards sustainability may influence the business image towards supporting a sustainability movement. Another study in Poland also showed evidence office spaces are demanded when the buildings are both accessible and sustainable. For many tenants, sustainable features are a key influence on their decision-making which relates to how they manage their corporate real estate interests. However, it has been shown that location can be a major influence on office occupation (Malgorzata et al., 2013).

An earlier study has examined the important factors for office occupation by tenants. The green building features were not categorized as an important consideration for office occupation decision-making by tenants (Adnan et al., 2012). As such, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the consideration from the tenants' perspective, specifically on the factors that are considered in a commercial office tenant's choice for green office occupation. Unlike previous research about tenants' preferences for green office buildings, this study utilizes an interpretive approach by a way of a semi-structured one-to-one interview. In this study, tenants are defined as occupiers in green office buildings that are occupying the premises for a certain amount of rent for a specific period. There has been no new study on the tenants' perceived sustainability for office building space choices in Kuala Lumpur. This study intends to explore the factors that are considered within this context. Thus, the research problem is formulated based on the premise that there is a lack of study on the influence of perceived sustainability on commercial tenants' office space choices at various locations in Kuala Lumpur. As two distinct office locations in Kuala Lumpur are the City center and Suburban, these two locations are chosen to be further explored the locational influence on the office buildings' choice by tenants within the perceived sustainability context.

This study aims to explore the consideration considered by commercial tenants at green buildings about office buildings' choices chosen from two distinct locations in Kuala Lumpur i.e. City Centre and Suburban. At this stage of the research, the City Centre of Kuala Lumpur will be generally defined as an area comprising the Golden Triangle, Central Business District, and Within City Centre, whereas the Suburban is the area that is not within the above definitions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development as known as the Brundtland Commission in their World Commission Environmental Development report has defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Drexhage & Murphy, 2010).

Green building is one of the instruments to achieve sustainability goals (Pengfei, 2011). There are many definitions of the different perspectives and influences of human interactions. Due to that reason, there is no right or wrong in the definition of sustainability because of differences between people and practice (Kemp & Martens, 2007). Now, there are almost five hundred (500) works of literature and there are still new definitions in process.

As the construction of green buildings has increased over time, evaluating schemes were introduced. The evaluation scheme is to assess and monitor the directions of green construction practices all over the world. Every rating is developed based on the weather and condition. Some of the prominent rating systems that are available are summarised below. The categorization was divided into two categories which are local ratings, developed in Malaysia, and international ratings.

## Tenants Behavioural

Greenhalgh (2008) also emphasized the locational decision, which focuses exclusively on the decision-making of large companies, and the size of organizations is important in driving the locational decision. The study has shown that large and small organisations have different preferences, and there are many processes to arrive at the locational decision. The study also explained that many factors and variables could influence the locational decision of the company.

Barnes (2003) demonstrated the growing dissatisfaction with the classical theory in which rent and location pose constraints and opportunities that may exist for them at certain times. The local-specific knowledge is based on geographic and historical factors regarding its generation and local conditions of its outcome. In the mainstream neo-classical, urban markets are illustrated logically and comprise universal entities. Leishman and Watkins (2004) also suggested that the model has a limitation in that it cannot capture the behavioural influences on the real estate market.

Neo-classical economy theories have always been used in real estate mantra, and the focus of the recent research has shifted to behavioural approaches. The behavioural approaches are more likely to explain the economy, where it theorizes that human behaviours are more complex than what is posed by the traditional economy theories (Agboola, 2015).

Greenhalgh (2008) also revealed that behavioural factors are the most critical influences on location. These factors include the company status, culture, and structure, which would strongly influence the office location decision. This notion is supported by an earlier study by Leishman and Watkins (2004), where the final decision is much more complicated than a simple location decision. The study is in contrast with an earlier study which has assumed that the individual companies are said to be rational, profit-maximizing, whose selection of office property will be dominated by a trade-off between accessibility and space.

The location decision is dynamic because the companies decide to locate their business based on the importance of their needs within the current situation and for their future needs. Thus, the location decision will affect future operations. Good location of operations affects the conditions in which they will be conducted. The size of operations would depend on the location's attractiveness, the level of the costs incurred as well as the productivity of the company (Rymarzak & Siemińska, 2012).

## The Demand for Green Office Buildings

### Building Features

The availability of a building can affect tenants to occupy green office buildings. In 2017, a study found that green office buildings in the United Kingdom still need to be improved and are not enough (Levy & Peterson, 2013). This specify that the availability of buildings may affect the decision to occupy green office buildings. Another study has highlighted that corporate tenants demand green office buildings, pushing the investor to fulfill the tenant's expectations. However, the study also found that the company wants to go green, but it has been hard to do that (Andelin et al., 2015).

### Cost and Financial

Eicholtz et al. (2010) and Falkenbach et al. (2010) stated tenants are willing to pay a higher rental to occupy a green office building because of its economic benefit such as investment in a long-term rent. It has been exposed that lower operating cost was generated in green office buildings (Fisher et al., 2011). However, several works of literature have posed arguments regarding the expectations of operating costs of green office buildings (Zieba & Belniak, 2013).

## **Health and Wellbeing**

The health and well-being of the tenants and occupiers of the building can be identified based on the post-occupancy of the building itself. The findings of a study by Brown and Cole (2009) revealed possible links to improving health and productivity and organizational culture. Within the health and well-being aspects, comfort has been defined as the absence of unpleasant sensations which positively affect well-being (Feige et al., 2013). In contrast to their conventional counterparts, green office buildings often rely on natural conditioning to meet end-users' comfort needs (Brown & Cole, 2009). It is observed that there is increasing usage of air-conditioners in commercial offices (Roussac & Bright, 2012).

## **Image and Branding**

Goodwill is also based on the performance of the company to date and the image that the company created (Zieba & Belniak, 2013). Much literature has shown that working in green office buildings increases the company's image. It tends to increase the company's capability as service providers engage with the customers, clients, employees, and their actions. Since a company with a good image has also considered employees, employees will likely hold positive perceptions towards their work and remain in the company (Rashid et al., 2012). The goodwill also existed by stakeholders keen to maintain the companies' key assets.

## **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Several studies explored the benefits of CSR from a sustainability context. The changes in corporate attitudes and the benefits of CSR have been reflected in the choice of the building (Dixon et al., 2009). CSR also bears the corporate decision on property markets (Eichholtz et al., 2010). The study also found that green office buildings tend to attract longer-term tenants (Myers et al., 2007). Sayce et al. (2009) also points out that many companies are occupying green office buildings due to their CSR policies. The study also indicates that all institutions are supportive of green office buildings (Boldy & Barnes, 2011).

## **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW**

As this study encompasses a comprehensive assessment of a group on the subject matter to address the 'how' and 'why' questions to be posed to the tenant's green office buildings in Kuala Lumpur, the case strategy was chosen. This will enable the researcher to access the actual phenomenon and the tenant's behavioral perspective.

For this study, two case studies were adopted for example case study 1 and 2. Two case studies are required in this study to cover the whole area of Kuala Lumpur. Through the definitions of office locations that have been described earlier, the City Centre and Suburban areas in Kuala Lumpur are the two locations that have been chosen as the case studies.

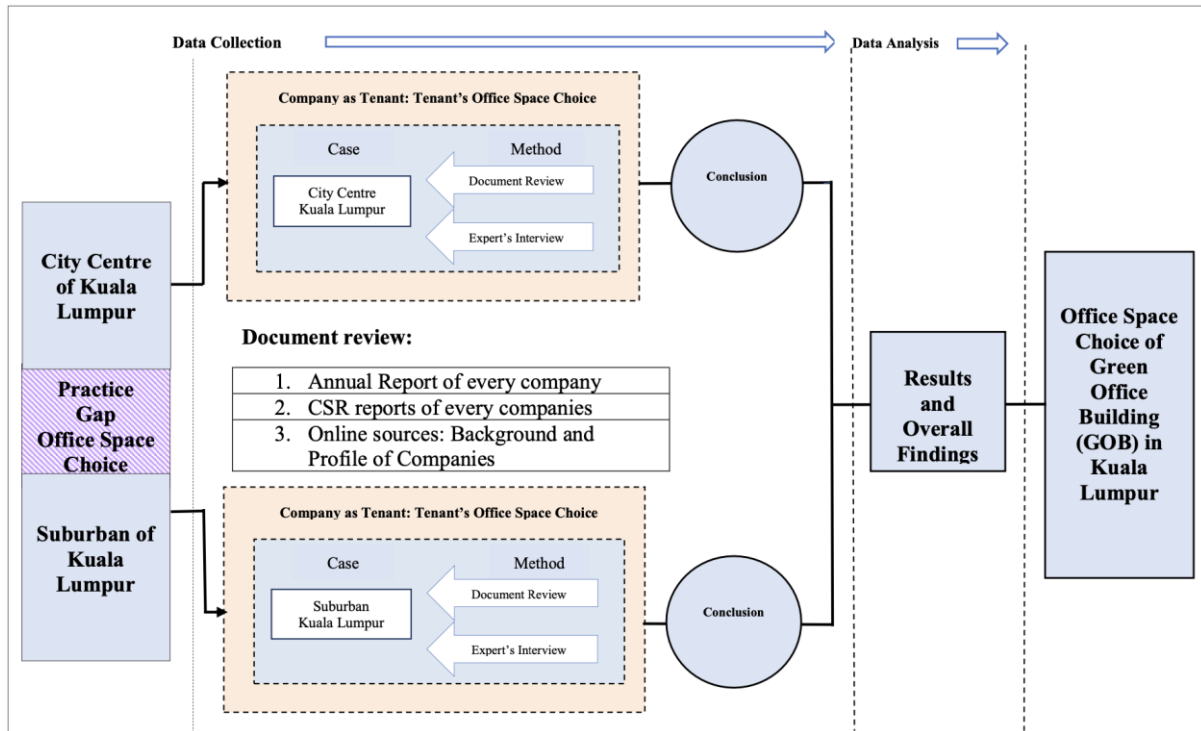


Figure 1: Research design for the qualitative study

The interview methodology is chosen as an appropriate method for obtaining the required information as it coincides with the features available to it. The interview method has features that make it possible to change the subject, adjust the topic flow or reject it further in the subject but must be taken by someone (Olsen, 2011).

This research needs to select the informants according to the predetermined criteria and purposive sampling is adopted during the selection of informants. This will allow the research question to be answered and answer the objective of the research (Saunders et al. 2009; Patton, 2002). This method is often used in case study research that uses small samples. Since the tenants or organizations in green office buildings are limited, this sampling is suitable and appropriate for this study. The informants were chosen based on their knowledge during office occupation choice. The informants may be a facilities manager, property department, or person in charge of the finalization of office space decisions for the company.

Other than that, a convenience sampling method is elected because of the need to find organizations that are willing to participate as informants. This study will choose the informants that are willing to be interviewed based on their availability and their background after the letter of invitation is given to all tenants in the green office building in Kuala Lumpur through the letter, email, or phone call.

Letters for an invitation to participate and the case study brief were sent to corporate companies either local or international in December 2016 until June 2017 of the thirty-four (34) buildings in two (2) different locations in Kuala Lumpur. Follow-up telephone calls and e-mails were made subsequently. Thirteen (13) tenants agreed to participate in this study; with most them comprising of personnel under the property and administration department. They comprise middle management staff with various positions under departments relate to office occupation decision-making. In addition, snowball sampling was also adopted to ascertain informants. This is a method whereby the following informants are attained from information given by previous informants (Saunders et al., 2009).

The total number of thirteen (13) informants is deemed sufficient for the study in line with Marshall (1996) who postulated an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research questions. In addition, the number of informants is considered adequate when new

categories, themes, and explanations cease to emerge from the data. This is the point where the data become saturated. Guest et al. (2006) carried out a study and found that the saturation had occurred in an early stage because a high level of homogeneity among the population may be sufficient to enable the development of meaningful themes and useful interpretation.

**Table 1:** List of semi-structured interview respondents

Management Level	Case Study	Location	Post/Designation
Middle Management	City Centre of Kuala Lumpur	Golden Triangle (GT)	1. Administration Manager 2. Executive of Leasing 3. Engineer from Sustainability and Project Department
		Central Business District (CBD) Within City Centre (WCC)	4. Human Resource Manager 5. Human Resource Manager 6. Property Manager of Property Department 7. Portfolio Manager of Property and Portfolio Department
	Suburban Kuala Lumpur	Suburban	1. Administration Manager 2. Administration Manager 3. Finance Administration Manager 4. Finance Administration Manager 5. Business Development Senior Executive 6. Admin Manager

**Table 2:** List of documentary evidence

No.	Document's Title	Description
1.	Annual Report	Annual report and the corporate social activities in the company.
2.	Online Sources	Official webpage of organisations- Mission and vision of a company, profile of company including history, a background of the company.
3.	Newspaper	The current and development of the companies.

The instruments used are semi-structural expert interviews. The semi-structured interview is selected following the previous explanation in section 3.4. Since the interviews provide essential sources of case study information; the case study interview is an open-ended interview, in which informants are asked about the facts of a matter as well as their opinion about events. This study applies focused interviews (Merton, 2008).

The interview will be done during the office hour between forty (40) to sixty (60) minutes in the individual office prepared beforehand. Before the interviews, the briefing has been sent online and before the interview. The informants also were assuring the confidentiality of the interview and signed the consent form beforehand.

The research instrument was developed with four (4) studies, A, B, C and D. Each section represents the research questions stated at the beginning of the research. The development of each section is also based on the analysis of the documents that were previously conducted involving annual reports of organisations, organisations location maps, organisations profiles, green building listings, and lists of tenants.

## **INTERVIEW AND DOCUMENT REVIEW RESULT**

According to the definition by NAPIC, the City Centre of Kuala Lumpur comprised of the areas which has been defined in the Property Market Report to include the Central Business District (CBD), Golden Triangle (GT), and Within City Centre (WCC) of Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, the remaining area is known as Suburban of Kuala Lumpur.

The informants are coded to ensure their anonymity. There are four characters in the alphanumeric code name; the first alphabet is constant as 'R' signifying the respondents as tenants of a green office building. The second alphabet 'C' signifies the location of tenants in the 'City centre' of Kuala Lumpur while 'S' signifies tenants located in the 'Sub-urban' area of Kuala Lumpur. The RC1 means informant 1 is in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. All other informants were coded by the following naming scheme.

### **Background of Tenants- Informants**

This study needs to identify the background of companies to uncover the determinants that the informants have made in choosing the office space for their operation. The differences in office space determinants may influence the choice in occupying green office buildings in Kuala Lumpur. The background and profiles of the companies such as the structure of company, supply of labor, CSR profiles, and other information are needed for this study to collect comprehensive information about the company. The document review will include the annual report, CSR report, webpage of company, and other sources related to this study.

The sampling of this study is not related to the building choice. The sampling has been done through the purposive sampling of tenants in green office buildings located in two identified locations in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, an explanation of a building background is needed to identify the location of the building itself. Next, the determination of the profiles of informants' is necessary to uncover the significance of the choices behind their office occupation choice for green office buildings. All the information is based on document review analysis to uncover the buildings profiles as well as the company's profiles and business objectives which include the corporate social responsibility (CSR), mission and vision, company's background, and other sources needed for this study.

## **Findings from Interview**

### **Prestigious location and good accessibility attract the tenants**

The type of companies that include international companies that deal with the operation of Southeast Asia and expatriates from overseas have shown varying preferences for this factor. The location also reflected the self-confidence and the image of the companies. The prestigious location and good accessibility can help the companies to be known. For example, the tenants in CBD area, involved with the insurance business, locate their companies in the middle of CBD hoping that they can compete with similar businesses and establish the name by using the strategic location. The Golden Triangle, CBD and WCC areas of Kuala Lumpur are the prestigious office location in Kuala Lumpur.

### **Good accessibility can reduce the transportation cost**

The companies tend to focus their office location in Kuala Lumpur CBD due to the accessibility to public transportation, amenities, technology, and clients (Wiley et al., 2010). This choice goes to show that most of the tenants prefer the location in the middle of the city. A previous study by Elgar et al. (2009) found that companies will choose proximity and good accessibility. Louw (1998) in a study of locational choice of behaviour lists a range of special factors compromising geographical position, accessibility, parking possibilities, the proximity of amenities and public transport, and quality of spatial

surroundings play important roles. The finding shows that all the requirements are fulfilled as the green office buildings do locate in a strategic area with good accessibility.

### **External Pressure from Headquarters**

Under the location theme, the different trades located the business in City Centre because of the accessibility and good location for the client and expatriate to visit the office. This can be seen as most of the tenants in green office buildings are foreign companies and they are locating the business because of the external pressure from the HQ. As the location in City Centre is near with the amenities such as hotel and airport transfer, the tenants choose to occupy the space. This was identified that the trade mostly from finance and oil and gas very emphasised the importance of the staff movement from one location to another location during outstation. On the other hand, the firms which are from the construction sector that are at green office buildings in City Centre and Suburban occupy the green office building because of their nature of business. Their business in sustainable construction requires them to occupy green office buildings. As the consultant for sustainable construction, tenants believe that occupying green office building in prestigious locations can help the client to recognize them. Special trade like Naval Technology is eventually related to the government sub-contractor. They occupy green office buildings to fulfill the requirement as set by the government of Malaysia which support the green movement by the United Nation. The governance also affects the cluster of trade in Suburban Kuala Lumpur. The tenants from IT trade tend to cluster in the MSC area provided by the government. The Multimedia Security Corridor (MSC) attracts the finance and IT trade to locate in the location. However, other trades such as sewerage and collection service, and food and beverage locate the business in the specific location because of headquarters and their factory being located near the specific location. It has been observed that almost all the informants that have provided their feedback on the office choice decision are companies that are big notwithstanding whether they are in the City Centre or Suburban of Kuala Lumpur.

### **Financial and Cost**

The rental cost and flexibility of space are important factors for the consideration of office choice in green office buildings (Greenhalgh, 2008). This also found in this study that the rental is also crucial for the choice of a green office building. The financial or cost aspect has been a consideration for new office space decisions by office occupiers (Dow & Porter, 2004; Haley & Kampa, 1989; Gibson, 2000). The themes as shown in Figure 4.9 also indicate that the informants have considered finances and cost as one important consideration. These factors are then put under the sub-theme of 'Financial and Cost'. Based on the interview, suggested that all informants agreed that the financial cost influences their decision due to the company structure and budget. The informants agreed that green office buildings do support the cost-saving elements due to energy efficiency. RC11 then justified that although the rental is quite high, the hidden charges and encumbrance are not borne by the tenants. As a result, the organisation is relieved that the cost can be reduced in many ways. Eicholtz et al. (2010) and Falkenbach et al. (2010) emphasised the importance of tenants willing to pay a premium on net rent with its economic benefit allowing investors to invest more in green office buildings. Literature has also exposed that lower operating cost was generated in green office buildings (Fisher et al., 2011). RC3 then interpreted that the cost-saving elements and sustainability are related to each other. The actual energy provision in green office buildings includes power management to reduce the usage.



## Energy Efficiency can reduce the operating cost

The perspective is viewed differently depending on the structure of the company. As the cost of operation is very important, they need to make sure that everything is aligned and profitable to the company.

The rent of green office buildings is quite expensive to the tenants but since the cost is already considered by the companies, they think that green office buildings can make them save a lot in terms of operating costs. The rental is related to other factors such as the certification.

## Tenants' willingness to pay for rental premium

The responses given by the majority of the tenants have revealed that the rental in green office buildings is expensive as compared with the conventional buildings. The tenant's willingness to pay a premium to occupy green office buildings is shown by some of the tenants in this study. The previous study by Eicholtz et al. (2010) and Falkenbach et al. (2010) have also emphasized that tenants are willing to pay for the price. This study also found that the tenants have acknowledged the lower operating cost of occupying green office building. The business operation is related to the financial cost that needs to be borne by the company. This factor is related to the company operational structure which may have considered the cost of operation and rental in considering locating their business in the green office building. Through the majority companies' policies and mission and vision, most of them have already invested to occupy the green office.

## Mission and vision towards Sustainability

While Greenhalgh's (2008) study has shown that the behavioural factors are the most important influences on location, some of the other factors which include the company status, company culture, and structure are strongly influencing the office location decision. Oil and gas, financial, construction, and sewerage service sectors are prone to occupy green office buildings as these companies would want to elevate their image to the public.

**Table 4: Corporate Social Responsibility**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>RC3</b>	<i>“in terms of the overall group they do a CSR initiative to go green. We do have people and we clean up, some activities that we have communities”</i>
<b>RC7</b>	<i>“[...] our company in France (HQ) is focusing towards sustainability where we are using renewable sources or energy. Since we are focusing towards that [sustainability] and we want to create compatible service”.</i>

However, it contrasts with the nature of company's business to which the information technology sector is related. This sector tends to want to satisfy its client rather than the public. Thus, their present study findings have revealed that companies from the oil and gas, construction, finance, IT, and insurance sectors tend to locate their businesses at prestigious location as they would want to enhance the image and branding of the companies. Since the main business of these companies relates to environmental resources, the companies believe that they have to comply with the policy. Most companies especially those in sewerage, oil, and gas.

Table 4: Cross Case Analysis between City Centre and Suburban of Kuala Lumpur

Themes	Case Study 1	Case Study 2
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location is very important</li> <li>• The accessibility, amenities, and public transport</li> <li>• Location is much more important than location</li> <li>• Location highlights the existence of the company &amp; its image</li> <li>• Strategic location eases the movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location is very important</li> <li>• Near with Suburban Centre</li> <li>• Near to public transport</li> <li>• Convenience to access any location</li> <li>• The distance between buildings is far</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The convenience of the location</li> <li>• Expatriates from local and overseas</li> <li>• Public transportation relates to the accessibility</li> <li>• Access to public amenities and hotel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public transport accessible</li> <li>• Effect of transportation cost</li> </ul>
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotel availability</li> <li>• Public transport availability</li> <li>• Infrastructures, near the shop or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of amenities at certain places</li> </ul>
Availability of Public Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MRT</li> <li>• LRT</li> <li>• KTM</li> <li>• Bus</li> <li>• Prevent traffic jams.</li> <li>• Reduce the cost of transportation.</li> <li>• Reduce car usage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LRT</li> <li>• MRT</li> <li>• Bus</li> <li>• Cost of transportation expensive</li> <li>• The company pays back for the usage of public transport</li> <li>• Don't need to face traffic jam</li> <li>• Near to highway</li> <li>• If the location is too far and they need to travel far, they will ask for more salary</li> <li>• Consider staff welfare that needs to ride public transport</li> <li>• They can claim back the payment</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

The decision-makers of the company tend to influence the location choice. For large companies, the stakeholders' and directors' decisions in headquarters will largely influence the decision. While in a smaller company, the business decide to locate in a green office building due to the strategic location and client-base purpose. In addition, they have to fulfill the business-related objectives in deciding the choice to occupy spaces for their business. Large companies tend to have CSR requirements and they want to satisfy their CSR policy. They want to occupy due to the business image and branding. In this paper, we attempt to fill a research gap by identifying specific green office building attributes that are important to tenants rather than the existing market. The paper focuses on the methodology used to achieve the objective of this research.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS & CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors contributed to this research. The first author is responsible for the writing of the manuscript, including the literature review, proposed methodology, and conclusion. The second author is responsible for the abstract, analysis and the manuscript's grammar.

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