

A Study on Job Satisfaction among Station Masters in A Rail Organization in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the variables affecting job satisfaction among station masters working for a renowned Malaysian train operator. Maintaining a motivated and effective staff is largely dependent on job satisfaction, particularly in the context of the transportation sector. The efficient functioning of train services, passenger safety, and overall customer satisfaction are crucially dependent on Station Masters. The success of the rail operator depends on their ability to comprehend their levels of job satisfaction and the elements influencing them. A mixed-methods strategy is used in the study, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A standardised questionnaire is sent to a sample of station masters representing different stations and lines during the quantitative phase. The survey comprises standardised scales to assess career satisfaction, work-life balance, overall job satisfaction, and stress connected to the job. To acquire a greater understanding of the Station Masters' opinions and experiences, semi-structured interviews are done with a subset of them throughout the qualitative phase. These interviews seek to learn more about the qualitative elements of job satisfaction, such as the value of job autonomy, the effects of shift work on personal time, and the impact of organisational policies on job satisfaction. According to preliminary research, Station Masters find fulfilment in their duties to ensure the safety of passengers, operational effectiveness, and the smooth running of the entire railway system. Positive interpersonal ties with bosses and coworkers also enhance employees' job satisfaction. However, issues with inconsistent working hours, high levels of stress at busy times, and a lack of opportunity for career progression become sources of dissatisfaction. The findings of this study will be a great source of information for the management of the rail operator, highlighting the areas that need to be improved to increase Station Masters' job satisfaction. The study's conclusions can help formulate plans for enhancing working conditions, dealing with stressors, and creating a more encouraging and happier workplace. The study's goal is to support the rail operator's efforts to maximise employee satisfaction, which will enhance overall operational effectiveness and the passenger experience.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Career Growth, Organisational Support, Station Masters, Train Operator, Malaysia, Transportation Industry, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research.

Background

It is an undeniable fact that rail transportation in Malaysia had played a significant role in the development of Malayan economy and transportation in late 19th and 20 century (Sharir, 2018). In the 19th century, the Malayan Peninsula became an important producer of tin-ore. The Colonial Office of the British Government in London had realized that only with a proper transportation system the iron ore industry in the Malayan peninsula be developed to greater heights and contribute to the economy of Malaya. Thus, the rail system was introduced in Malaya in 1885 from Taiping to Port Weld. By 1930s, the rail system had been extended from Padang Besar to Singapore in the west coast and from Gemas to Tumpat in the east coast of the peninsula, operating light rail transits, metro rapid rail and shuttle passenger services in Kuala Lumpur and connecting to other cities and towns. Currently Malaysia has over 1,000 kilometres of rail networks and has over five (5) rail companies providing daily rail services for passengers and freight transportation.

This research will undertake to study on the job satisfactions of Station Masters of a rail operator in Malaysia. This study will also gauge the level of job satisfactions of the Station Masters in the said rail organization as they play a significant role in the operation of daily rail services to not only the Malaysian but to the international public as well.

Each station in the rail system in Peninsula Malaya is manned by a Station Master and his assistants. Their duties are mainly to manage the station's operations, sale of train tickets, coordinate with other stations on the incoming and outgoing of train traffic into and from their stations, clearance of route for trains coming into and outgoing from the station, ensure the orderly embarkation and disembarking of passengers from and into the train, safety and security of their station, crew and passengers and other relevant duties. The resultant data of this study will serve as a guideline for continuous improvement for the rail organization and to other rail operators in Malaysia as well. The data collected from this study can also be used by the head of the rail organization to know the top management's shortcomings and which areas they would need to motivate their staff so that the quality and productivity of the organization can be further improved.

Issues and Problems

It has come to an understanding of the author that a substantial number of Station Masters are not very satisfied with the remuneration received from their management when comparing to their current job description and scope of work performed by them. (<https://www.transportmalaysia.com/ktm-berhad/>). There are also voices of disgruntlements and frustrations expressed by the affected Station Masters during dialogues with them by the author. Dissatisfaction is also caused by the challenges, obstacles and hindrances, demotivating factors faced by these Station Masters. As such, this topic was chosen to explore on the level of satisfaction of the Station Masters with regards to the challenges, obstacles and hindrances, demotivating factors that hinders on their performances (Heong, 2019)

Research Questions Posed

- a. To what extend are the Station Masters are satisfied with their current job description, daily routine, facilities offered by their management, and remunerations received?
- b. What are the challenges and demotivating issues faced by the Station Masters in conducting their daily functions and that affects their performances?

- c. What are obstacles and demotivating factors encountered by the Station Masters that hinders their daily functions and that affects their performances?

The objectives of this research paper will be to answer the questions posed in above a, b and

Significance of Study

Quality of work life in an organization is a critical factor for deciding employee related outcomes in modern organizations. The main aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of the quality of work life and job performance dimensions through a survey method using a questionnaire administered to a sample of ten Station Masters who are employed at the rail organization.

4.1. Factors such as accurate timely arrival and departure, comfort of the passengers, safety of the passengers and the rail equipment and rolling stock, transportation of essential freight within the states in the peninsula and overall contribution to the economy of Malaysia, determines the success and profitability of the said rail organization in Malaysia. These factors will also ensure the rail organization to stay afloat and to have an edge against its competitors.

4.2. Furthermore, the Government is now studying to implement the High-Speed Rail (HSR) and a new East Coast Rail system from Port Klang to Kota Bahru, known as the ECRL. All this introduction of new rail system operated by the rail organization's competitors will certainly add pressure to the rail organization to perform and to walk that extra mile to have an advantage against these competitors. In connection to these factors, Station Masters play a significant role and an important link to the success of the rail organization. They are the ones who determine the safety of the train routes, passengers, timely arrival of freights and most of all to manage the tickets sale revenue in each station.

4.3. As such, if at all the Station Masters aren't very satisfied with their job and affects their performances, then certainly the whole rail system will be severely affected and would be bring to the collapse of the system. Therefore "the Rail Station Master is considered as one of the reputed officials in a Rail Station." (<https://www.jagranjosh.com/articles/how-to-become-rail-station-master-1497513987-1>, 2018)

4.4. A Station Master is responsible for every official activity that happens in the rail station in which he is appointed. Every official task inside the station premises needs to be supervised, guided, and approved by him. He is also responsible for smooth, safe, and efficient running of station. In short, he is overall responsible official hired by rails for that rail station." (Chanda, 2018)

Scope

The scope of this study is limited to the position of Station Masters in the rail organization and involves around 10 stations throughout the West Coast of Peninsula Malaysia.

Summary

The author/researcher of this project weren't able to interview all Station Masters/ Managers in the rail organization in the peninsula and as such the study is only limited to around 10 Station Master/Managers of the main stations and the Rail Unions in the peninsula. However, their views were especially important to determine the goal and objective of this project paper.

The author's research was also disrupted due to ongoing CMCO (Conditional Controlled Movement) imposed by the Government of Malaysia in Klang and Klang Valley. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian_movement_control_order, 2021). This has limited

the author's travel to interview these Station Masters/ Managers. As such, the researcher had to resort to sending the questionnaires by email or do the survey by phone. This had posed great inconvenience to both parties but nevertheless the author managed to get replies from most of them.

Literature Review

An Overview

This section discusses an overview of the job description of Station Masters and a perception towards their top management that depicts the level of their job satisfaction.

Available Literatures

The researcher chose this topic because there is a lack of study on the subject. Not much articles or literature reviews is written on the job satisfaction of Stations Masters/Managers particularly in major rail organization. The researcher is basing some literature reviews from the Internet and on his previous thesis work entitled "The Contribution of Malayan Rail towards the Transportation and Economy of Malaysia."

In 'A Review of Literature and Public Datasets for the Application of Artificial Intelligence in the Rail Industry,' writer Mauro José Pappaterra, (2022) had elaborated a holistic overview of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications in the rail industry. His research covers diverse subdomains of rail systems such as traffic planning, and scheduling, logistics and optimization, maintenance, safety and security, passenger experience, communication, and autonomous trains. However, he had hardly touched on the Station Master or their condition of works. (Mauro José Pappaterra, 2022).

K.P. Mani, Dr.R. Sritharan and Dr.R. Gayatri in their research entitled, Impact of Occupational Stress on Quality Work Life among Rail Station Masters of Trichy in India Mani et al (2014) had discussed elaborately on the condition of rail station masters in Trichy India however, the rail condition, situation and characteristics of works in India differs widely when compared to the above-mentioned major rail organization's operations in Malaysia. As such their works were more of India-centric and the issues and problems are different of those encountered by Station Masters in the rail organization Malaysia.

Łukasz Wolniewicz, in his works entitled Literature Review on the Rail Transport Schedule Robustness Wolniewicz (2020) discussed more of the issues and problems in rail scheduling but hardly talked of issues of Station Masters.

Aakashkumawat in his post entitled 'Rail Station Master Salary, Job Profile and Career Growth', (<https://www.sscadda.com/rrb-ntpc-station-master-salary-job-profile-and-career-growth/>, 2023) states that "A Station Master (SM) is in charge of running trains at a station. He operates the signals and makes sure that everything goes as per the rules. It is the ultimate job of the Station Master, to keep all the passenger amenities fit & fine at his station and makes sure the rail traveller does not face any problem. He is also obliged to take care of passengers, boarding/ deboarding trains from his station. A Station Master has to work in shifts (Mani et al., 2014)

He also maintains that the "Station Masters are responsible for the upkeep and cleanliness of the station. At small stations, Station Masters are assigned with commercial jobs like ticket/parcel booking, reservation etc. They are also supposed to help the rail traveller in all respect. In case of any exigencies/ accident, the Station Master plays the role of manager at his station and takes care of rescue operation etc."

From the dissertation entitled, “The Contribution of Rail Organization towards Transportation and Economy of Malaysia,” Rajamanikam (2003) the researcher, R. Santhana Raja, had come to understand that there are staff, especially operation staff including Station Masters, in the rail organization who were dissatisfied with their organization. In the research, the researcher says that “according to the Communication Executive of the rail organization, their top management had reduced staff strength from 7,596 persons in 1992 to 5,096 staff in year 2000. Staff that are retired and those who have left the organization are not replaced. Their jobs are divided among the existing staff, and this has added unnecessary workload, burden and pressure on the existing staff and thus affecting them psychologically and later demoralizing them. As such the quality of work and efficiency expected from the staff is reduced or remains unsatisfactory. Jabbar adds further that there had been no recruitments for the past 7 years (since 2000)” (Rajamanikam, 2003).

The Communication Executive further added that some of the more senior staffs were still having the old colonial attitude and behaviour, self-centred and jealous of their own colleagues. This behaviour of the senior staffs had created factions amongst them. Animosity, suspicion, and uneasy working environment, diminishing remuneration and benefits had led to dissatisfaction among the staffs, one of which are the Station Masters.

The researcher during his previous research also received feedback from some Station Masters who were stationed in ‘overseas’ were paid salaries in Ringgit Malaysia currency despite the staffs having to live and spend in the overseas country’s currency for their daily livelihood. These staffs paid their utilities bills, buy their food and provisions all in the overseas currencies which currently is multiple times higher than Ringgit Malaysia. The staffs and Station Masters have personally expressed their dissatisfaction to the researcher with regards to this ‘currency exploitation’ by the rail organization. However surprisingly the rail organization charges in the respective overseas’ currencies for rail tickets bought by passengers in the respective country. According to the staff down there, this clearly depicts a double standard in the rail administration.

The researcher also received feedback from previous research that there were no more recreational activities in the rail organization since their recreational clubs were closed down some years back. Prior to the closure of these clubs, there were sports day, recreational activities in the rail organization but any longer. This is another demoralizing factor according to the rail Station Masters and operation staffs.

Some of the Station Masters also claim that they were not informed of the latest development in their rail administration and were kept in the dark. A Station Master expressed regret and frustration that despite the rail organization undergoing restructuring and change of management, they were still unaware of their current job status, benefits, advantages, or disadvantages derived from the restructuring.

Some Station Masters had voiced out the grievances saying that the rail organization does not practice a fair and min-max policy in staff promotion schemes. According to them, some Operation staff who had been serving the organization for almost 20 to 25 years were not promoted but junior staff who managed to pull “bigger cables and strings” were able to get to the promotion ladder quite instantly.

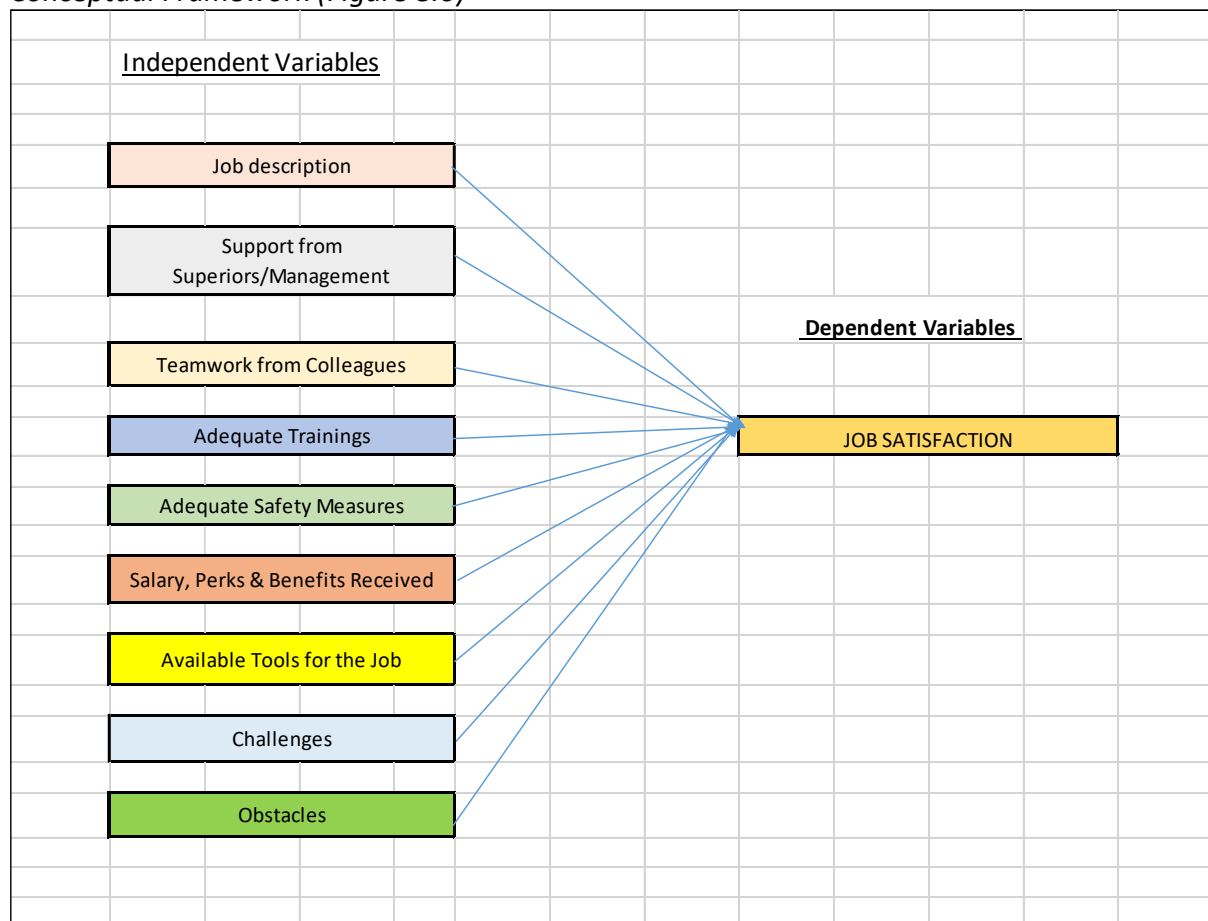
The Station Masters further added that many of the top officials seldom come down to the ‘field’ (ground). They sit in their posh offices and wait for feedback from their managers and supervisors who sometimes do not give the correct picture of what’s happening or the reality as it is at the Operations sector. As such some of the top-level Executives do not hear the

voices of their employees or the latter’s views. A Senior Station Master shared this sentiment with the researcher during his research.

Summary of Related Studies

Most of the previous research studies had only discussed on the general contribution of the rail organization towards the Economy of Malaysia and not much of the grievances from some of the Operation staffs, including the Station Master. Whereas in this study, the research focuses on the level of job satisfaction among the Station Masters from their job description, level of support from their Superiors and management, teamwork from colleagues, salary, perks and benefits offered, adequate trainings to help in their daily routine and safety measures, challenges, obstacles and other factors. The satisfaction level element is a significant factor that makes or breaks Station Masters. A dissatisfied Station Master will lack in his performance and its consequences will be disastrous especially when their main core of the job is to manage the train traffic operations.

Conceptual Framework (Figure 8.0)



Methodology

The researcher had used a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach in determining the methodology for this research. A set of questionnaires was developed and distributed to Station Masters who manage the main stations from Padang Besar to Johor Bahru. All data collected are numerical data based on Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The numerical representation are as follows: Number 1= Strongly disagree, Number 2=Disagree, Number 3= Neutral, Number 4=Agree and Number 5=Strongly agree.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were derived from independent variables shown in Figure 8.0 and using primary data collection. Questions in Section A relate to demographic. Questions in Section B relate to the respondent's perception towards their job satisfaction in the rail organization. It contains 15 questions. A 5-point Likert Scale was used in measuring the responses. Secondary data is information gathered from sources already exists such as the researcher's previous research in the rail organization as mentioned in item 7.2 which has used as references. Replies were made thru emails and orally.

The Survey

The outcome of this research is based on the purposes and problems of the analysis of data which have been gathered from around 10 Station Masters via questionnaires about their job satisfaction at their respective stations. Two type of survey forms were distributed to the Station Masters, namely Survey Form Section A and Survey Form Section B. Section A consist of questionnaires on demographic elements while Section B consist of questionnaires with regards to the level of their job satisfaction elements.

Profile of Respondent

There were eight questions related to the respondents' demographic revealed in Section A survey form. Demographic profiles in this study acquire the respondent detail especially on gender, age, highest qualification, primary job scope, duration of working in the rail organization, nationality, number of staff currently reporting to the respective Station Masters and type of current employment in the rail organization.

Components on the Demographic Survey

- a. On gender - all the Station Masters were males.
- b. Age- 35% of the Station Masters interviewed were within the age of 30-35 years of age, 47% of the Station Masters/ Managers interviewed were within the age of 35-40 years of age and 35% of the Station Masters/ Managers interviewed were within the age of 40-45 years of age whereas 18% of the Station Masters/ Managers interviewed were above the age of 45 years of age.
- c. Highest Qualification - An average of 62% of the Station Masters interviewed were SPM qualified (which is equivalent of UK's O level education). Around 23% of them were STPM (which is equivalent of UK's A level education) qualified and 15% of them were Diploma and above qualified.
- d. Primary Job Scope- In the interview conducted, all of the Station Masters/ Managers registered that their primary job scope encompassed Administration, Train Operations, Sales & marketing, Information Technology and Procurement within their Stations.
- e. Duration of time working in the rail organization the Station Masters interviewed conveyed that they were appointed to their current positions through from rank and file starting from a junior position as clerical and administration assistants. They had to work more than 5 years to be promoted to higher ranks as Officers, Executives and Masters. As such most of the Station Masters had served more than 5 years in their current positions and more than 10 years in the rail organization.
- f. Nationality- All the Station Masters interviewed are locals.

g. Number of staff currently reporting to the Masters – Since the Station Masters interviewed are all managing the main stations in, they require quite a number of staff to help them to administer and operate the Stations. As such, almost all of them are managing ten staffs or more in each station.

h. Type of current employment service- All the Station Masters interviewed are hired based on permanent employment basis.

Findings of the Job Satisfaction Level Survey

a. Did the rail organization clearly convey its mission to employees?

i) 85% of the Station Masters interviewed agree that the rail organization did clearly disseminate the company's missions, goals, visions, and other instructions to its employees.

ii) 13% of the Station Masters interviewed chose to remain neutral in this regard.

iii) 2% of the Station Masters interviewed were of the opinion that the rail organization had hardly consulted them on company's direction of even seek their advice or opinions.

b. Do the Station Masters communicate well with their employees?

i) All of the Station Masters interviewed 100% agree that they do communicate well with their employees.

c. Did the rail organization provide the necessary tools for its employees to perform their duties?

i) All of the Station Masters interviewed 100% agree that the rail organization do provide the necessary tools for its employees to perform their duties.

d. Did the rail organization provide the necessary training for the Station Masters to perform their job?

i) All of the Station Masters interviewed 100% agree that the rail organization do provide the necessary trainings for the Station Masters to perform their duties.

e. Is the amount of work expected from the Station Masters reasonable?

i) 92% of the Station Masters agree that the amount of work expected from the Station Masters is reasonable.

ii) 8% of them chose to be in neutral.

f. Is the rail organization fully utilizing the Station Masters role well?

i) 100% of the Station Masters do agree that the rail organization is fully utilizing the former's role its optimum.

g. Do the Station Masters have a good relationship with their colleagues and peers?

i) 86% of the Station Masters agree they do get along well with colleagues and peers.

ii) 12% chose to be on the neutral side.

iii) 2% agree they find hard at times to have a good relationship with their colleagues and peers.

h. Is the moral in Station high?

i) All of the Station Masters interviewed 100% agree that the moral is high in their station.

i. Is the current job scope of the Station Masters exceeding their stated job description?

i) 36% chose to be in the neutral while 57% agree that their job scope exceed their stated job description.

ii) Only 7% agree that their current job scope fits their stated job description.

- j. Are the Station Masters happy with their current salary and benefits?
 - i) 96% of the Station Masters agree with their current salary and benefits received.
 - ii) 3% disagree with their current salary and benefits received.
 - iii) 1% chose to be in the neutral.
- k. Is the Station Masters happy with their current position and job description?
 - i) 83% of the Station Masters are happy with their current position and job description.
 - ii) 17% chose to be in the neutral.
- m. Do the Station Masters' Superior Officers do a good a job?
 - i. The Station Masters 96% agree that their Superior Officers do a good a job.
 - ii) 4% chose to be in the neutral.
- n. Do their Superior Officers promote an atmosphere of teamwork?
 - i) 66% of the Station Masters are of the view that their Superior Officers do indeed promote an atmosphere of teamwork.
 - ii) 36% of the Station Master chose to be in the neutral.
- o. Do the Superior Officers provide an actionable suggestion on how to improve with regards to Station Masters performances?
 - i) 97% of the Station Masters chose to be in the neutral.
 - ii) 3% said in the negative.
- p. Do the Superior Officers address the Station Masters' concern and doubts?
 - i) 98% of the Stations Masters chose to be in the neutral.
 - ii) 2% said yes

Summary of Findings

From the above survey sampling respond, we can summarize the following findings:

1. That the rail organization clearly conveys its missions, visions, goals, targets and instruction to its especially the Station Masters.
2. That the rail organization communicates well with its employees.
3. That the rail organization provides all the necessary tools needed for the Station Masters to conduct their job functions.
4. That The rail organization provides well for the necessary trainings for the Station Masters.
5. That Station Masters feel well utilized in their role.
6. That the amount expected work done by Station Masters are reasonable.
7. That most of the Station Masters get along well with their colleagues and peers.
8. That the Station Masters keep the moral high in their respective Stations.
9. That the current functions performed by the Station Masters well exceed their job description.
10. That almost all of the Station Masters are generally happy with their salary and remuneration received except for a very few.
11. That the Station Masters are satisfied with their current positions and their job description.
12. That generally the Station Masters agree that their Superior Officers do promote an atmosphere of teamwork. None of them disagreed as only 36% of them chose to take neutral stand.
13. That the Station Masters comfortably feel that their Superior Officer's do a good job.

14. That the Station Masters also do agree that the Superior Officers do provide actionable suggestions and ideas along the way.

15. That the Station Masters' Superior Officers also do address the former's concerns and doubts whenever necessary.

In relation to the findings, it is clearly explained that all four Independent variables (IV) have a significant correlation in deciding the job satisfaction of the Station Masters. Furthermore, the above survey study conducted also shows the evaluation of the level of job satisfaction of the respective Station Masters. The survey indicators clearly predict the level of job satisfaction of the Station Masters.

Answering Research Question No.1

To what extent are the Station Masters are satisfied with their current job description, daily routine, facilities offered by their management, and remunerations received?

The above study reveals that the Station Masters are generally satisfied with regards to their current job description, daily routine, facilities offered by their management, and remunerations received. This can be seen in the survey results.

Answering Research Question No.2

What are the challenges and demotivating issues faced by the Station Masters in conducting their daily functions and that affects their performances?

From the above survey study and oral interview findings, we can also summarize that the Station Masters are able to manage challenges or demotivating factors that they face along the way. They can be seen in the results that they always manage to keep their station staff moral high.

Answering Research Question No.3

What are obstacles and demotivating factors encountered by the Station Masters that hinders their daily functions and that affects their performances?

As we see from the previous chapter's survey results, the only obstacle or demotivating factor is that 36% of Station Master/Manager had remained neutral on their Superior Officers' ability to create an atmosphere of teamwork. The former had not disagreed but remained neutral. There was also a sense of careful dissemination of information with regards to questions posed on their Superior Officers.

Another imposing factor that can be seen is that 57% of the Station Masters view is that their current job exceeds what is being stated in their job description and 36% remained neutral. As such if the Station Masters are carrying multiple tasks than their employer THE RAIL ORGANIZATION should investigate seriously so that former are not exhausted when performing the main core tasks which is the train operations.

Recommendations

From the survey sampling conducted and result analysis, we recommend results, we can recommend a few improvements as below:

As mentioned above in item 11.0, the rail organization should seriously investigate Station Masters job description if they are multi tasked and overburdened. The Station Masters should not be exhausted when coming to perform their main train operations tasks.

Some of the Station Masters had chosen to remain neutral on several sensitive questions like salary, relationship with their colleagues and their Superior even though most of them

answered positively to these questions. This is probably not to offend their colleagues or their immediate Superior Officers. In my point of view, the rail organization should enhance team spirit among the staff and have outings or Family Day occasionally. This will further strengthen the working relationship between their colleagues and their Superiors.

Limitations and Future Research

As stated in Chapter 1, the author/researcher of this project weren't able to interview all Station Masters/ Managers in the rail organization in the peninsula and as such the study is only limited to around 10 Station Masters of the main stations and the Rail Unions in the peninsula. However, their views were especially important to determine the goal and objective of this project paper.

The author's research was also disrupted due to ongoing CMCO (Conditional Controlled Movement) imposed by the Government of Malaysia in Klang and Klang Valley. This has limited the author's travel to interview these, Station Masters. As such, the researcher had to resort to sending the questionnaires by email or do the survey by phone. This had posted great inconvenience to both parties but nevertheless the author managed to get replies from most of them.

The researcher also proposes a similar study can also be conducted on the Locomotive Drivers and other Operation staff. These studies can be very useful for the rail organization when doing Human Capital Management on these operation staff.

Conclusion

The researcher concludes that the entire research outcomes and positive recommendation has been outlined. Furthermore, this study also successfully addressed the research problem and magnificently achieved the research objective despite the shortcomings and limitations. In conclusion, the Station Masters/ Managers are performing well with current pandemic conditions whereby the service quality offered fulfils their customers i.e., passengers and safe operations of the trains. In addition, the efficiency of the Station Masters can even be grater with a slight improvement if the rail organization is able to address the recommendations mentioned.

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