**Testing McClelland’s Theory of Needs with Feeling Individually Accountable and**

**Informal Accountability for Others in the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO)**

**Headquarters, Kuala Lumpur.**

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**ABSTRACT**

There are growing concerns in the academic discourses about a perceived lack of accountability especially in the public sector. The constant cases of mismanagement, fraud and corruption raised a question on the subjective sentiments that affect the level of accountability on individual. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship of dimensions in McClelland’s Theory of Needs and how felt accountable mediates employees to be informally accountable for others. A total of 103 questionnaires from employees of the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur have been analysed. The findings indicate that each dimension in McClelland’s Theory of Needs contributed to employees to feel individually accountable at varying degrees and it partially mediated the relationship between needs and informal accountability for others. The findings also revealed that the need for achievement contributes to informal accountability for others the most when it is mediated with felt accountable.

**Keywords:** Theory of Needs, felt accountability, informal accountability for others

**1 Introduction**

This research dissertation discusses the issue of accountability in the public sector. It examines the elements of McClelland’s Theory of Needs which comprises need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power and determine how these elements could influence the accountability trait of public employees in Malaysia particularly employees at the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

**2 Background**

[1] declared that Malaysia has one of the worst public sector corruptions in Southeast Asia. Managing public funds with accountability enforced with transparency and the rule of law is a must to avoid misappropriation of funds from happening by public officials. Over the last few years, there have been several high-profile cases involving mismanagement of funds in the public sector which involved three main aspects such as political, legal, and administrative [2]. These cases have caused the public agencies to lost billions of ringgits. [3] stated that these high-profile cases which involved billions of ringgits are simply too complex for the ordinary Malaysians to really understand the scale of corruption taking place in Malaysia.

[4] cited a case of mismanagement of assets in the Royal Malaysian Police that was reported between 2010 and 2012. The case attracted public attention as the RMP reported various types of assets missing such as handcuffs, firearms, police vehicles, and other assets that cost the government RM 1.33 million. This case has tarnished the reputation of an authority body which is supposed to uphold law and justice in Malaysia. With these crucial roles in the public, this study would perhaps give civil servants at the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur a better understanding of accountability concepts sourced from credible journals and other academic sources.

**3 Problem Statement**

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) reported to the Dewan Rakyat in April 2019 that 418 public servants were arrested for numerous misappropriations of assets or funds offences in 2018 as reported by The Star Online. The issue of accountability and integrity flooded national and international headlines recently makes Malaysians to question the level of accountability and integrity that the public sector has. The National Anti-Corruption Plan 2019-2023 by Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) reported that 57 percent of Malaysians think police officers mostly involved in corruption with 45 percent of the respondents think government officials are also involved in corruption [4].

However, with recent scandals hitting the misappropriation of public funds such as the 1MDB case, FELDA, MARA, Tabung Haji, and Sabah Water Department has caused the Malaysian public to feel divided on the accountability of several public institutions such as Bank Negara, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Malaysian Public Accounts Committee [5]. In 2019, the Prime Minister Office published a report on the issue of an anti-corruption plan which stated that the public sector is the most vulnerable to corruption with 63.3 percent of vulnerability compared to the private sector with 17.06 percent. This worrying rate is contributed mostly by high vulnerability to corruption in the public sector sourced from weak governance in the procurement sector, legal enforcement agencies, and the public administration.

This research would hopefully be able to add in the perspective of McClelland’s Theory of Needs and its relationship with the accountability aspect among public employees in Malaysia’s public organisation or in this specific dissertation, Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. As SOCSO is established to enforce the Employees Social Security Act 1969 and the Employees’ Social Security (General) Regulations 1971 in which it has the responsibility to manage the pool resources and fund from the public in particular the employers and labours, the accountability, transparency and integrity should be the core of its operation from the lowest level to the highest level of management. The study is significant in bringing the public’s trust towards the accountability of the public sector after several issues that have hit public employees’ reputation as public servants who are responsible to serve the public’s needs.

**4 Research Questions**

4.1 Does felt accountability mediate the relationship between achievement needs and informal accountability such that achievement needs enhance felt accountability and subsequently promote informal accountability for others in the Social Security Organisation headquarters in Kuala Lumpur?

4.2 Does felt accountability mediate the relationship between affiliation needs and informal accountability such that affiliation needs empower felt accountability and subsequently increase informal accountability for others in the Social Security Organisation headquarters in Kuala Lumpur?

4.3 Does felt accountability mediate the relationship between power needs and informal accountability such that power needs improve felt accountability and subsequently boost informal accountability for others in the Social Security Organisation headquarters in Kuala Lumpur?

4.4 Which is the most influencing need that affects the felt accountability and subsequently improves informal accountability for others among civil servants at the Social Security Organisation headquarters in Kuala Lumpur?

**5 Results**

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| **Table 1.** Demographic Table |
| Description of items | Category | Frequency | Percent (%) |
| Gender | Male | 42 | 40.8 |
| Female | 61 | 59.2 |
|  |  |  |  |
| Age | 25 - 30 years old | 20 | 19.4 |
| 31 - 35 years old | 26 | 25.2 |
| 36 - 40 years old | 19 | 18.4 |
| 41 - 45 years old | 15 | 14.6 |
| 46 - 50 years old | 10 | 9.7 |
| 50 years and above | 13 | 12.6 |
|  |  |  |  |
| Race | Bumiputera | 98 | 95.1 |
| Chinese | 3 | 2.9 |
| Indian | 2 | 1.9 |
| Others | 0 | 0 |
|  |  |  |  |
| Marital Status | Single | 35 | 34 |
| Married | 66 | 64.1 |
| Divorced | 2 | 1.9 |
|  |  |  |  |
| Education Level | Primary/Secondary | 19 | 18.4 |
| Certificate/Diploma/Professional | 34 | 33.0 |
| Bachelor Degree/Master/PhD | 50 | 48.5 |

N=103. *Table 1 shows the demographic table for respondents involved in the survey.*

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for respondents who were involved in this study. The description items include gender, age, education level, race, and marital status.

There were 42 male respondents who answered the instrument used in this study. This figure represents 40.8 percent of respondents. Meanwhile, female respondents involved were 61 people. This figure represents 59.2 percent of respondents involved in this study.

Ages of respondents involved in the study are shown in the second row of the table. Most of respondents were between 31 and 35 years old as there were 26 (25.2 percent) of them who have answered this instrument. The second greatest number of respondents who have answered this study is between 25 and 30 years old with 20 of them are in this age bracket or 19.4 percent of the whole respondents. The least number of respondents were from 46 to 50 years as there were only 10 (9.7 percent) of them involved in this study. Others included between 36 and 40 years old with 19 respondents involved (18.4 percent), 41 to 45 years old respondents with 15 respondents (14.6 percent), and the oldest respondents aged 50 years above with 13 respondents (12.6 percent).

This is followed by the races of respondents involved in this study. Bumiputera respondents represent the majority of respondents who answered this instrument with 98 out of 103 respondents in the organisation. This figure represents 95.1 percent of the whole respondents. Besides that, there were three (2.9 percent) Chinese respondents and two (1.9 percent) Indian respondents who were involved in this study.

Next demographic to be observed is the marital status of the respondents involved. Most of them are married with 66 respondents (64.1 percent). Divorced respondents have the least number of respondents in this study with two (1.9 percent) respondents only. Lastly, single respondents represent 34 percent of the whole respondents or 35 out of 103 respondents.

The last row shows the education level of respondents at the Social Security Organisation Headquarters who were involved in this study. Majority of the respondents have a Bachelor degree, Master’s degree, or a PhD with 50 (48.5 percent) of the 103 respondents of them. The second most common education level that the respondents have is certificate, diploma, or professional with 34 of respondents having either three of these qualifications. This figure represents 33 percent of the whole respondents. Lastly, primary or secondary school qualification has the least number of respondents with only 19 (18.4 percent) of them have it as their highest level of education.

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| **Table 2**. Mediation Results for Need for Achievement |
| Step 1: Mediator Variable Regressed on the Independent Variable |
|  | Coeff. | SE | *t* | *p* |
| Mediator: Felt Accountability |  |  |  |  |
| NACH | 0.3 | 0.05 | 5.3 | 0.00 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 2: Dependent Variable Regressed on Independent Variable |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| NACH | 1.55 | 0.14 | 1.09 | 0.28 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 3: Dependent Variable Regressed on Mediator (IAFO) with the Independent Variable Included |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| MV: Felt Accountability  |  |  |  |  |
| NACH | 0.58 | 0.13 | 4.4 | 0.00 |

N=103

Need for achievement explains 34 percent of the variability in informal accountability for others. Moreover, need for achievement does not have a significant relationship with the informal accountability for others, F(2, 100) = 26.2, p < .05 (ꞵ = 1.55). However, need for achievement has a significant relationship on informal accountability for others only when it is mediated with felt accountable, F(2, 100) = 26.2, p < .05 (ꞵ = .0.3).

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| **Table 3**. Mediation Results for Need for Affiliation |
| Step 1: Mediator Variable Regressed on the Independent Variable |
|  | Coeff. | SE | *t* | *p* |
| Mediator: Felt Accountability |  |  |  |  |
| NAF | 0.97 | 0.22 | 4.37 | 0.00 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 2: Dependent Variable Regressed on Independent Variable |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| NAF | 0.18 | 0.12 | 1.57 | 0.12 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 3: Dependent Variable Regressed on Mediator (IAFO) with the Independent Variable Included |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| MV: Felt Accountability  |  |  |  |  |
| NAF | 0.47 | 0.13 | 3.7 | 0.0003 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Need for affiliation explains 35 percent of the variance in informal accountability for others. Need for affiliation does not have a significant relationship with informal accountability for others F(2, 100) = 27.2, p < .05 (ꞵ = .18). However, need for affiliation has a significant relationship with informal accountability for others only when it is mediated with felt accountable F(2, 100) = 27.2, p < .05 (ꞵ = .47).

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| **Table 4**. Mediation Results for Need for Power |
| Step 1: Mediator Variable Regressed on the Independent Variable |
|  | Coeff. | SE | *t* | *p* |
| Mediator: Felt Accountability |  |  |  |  |
| NPOW | 0.77 | 0.13 | 6.03 | 0.00 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 2: Dependent Variable Regressed on Independent Variable |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| NPOW | 0.5 | 0.08 | 0.63 | 0.53 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Step 3: Dependent Variable Regressed on Mediator (IAFO) with the Independent Variable Included |
| DV: IAFO |  |  |  |  |
| MV: Felt Accountability |  |  |  |  |
| NPOW | 0.3 | 0.05 | 5.8 | 0.00 |

Need for power explains 34 percent of the variance in informal accountability for others. Furthermore, need for power has no significant relationship with informal accountability for others F(2, 200) = .629, p < .05 (ꞵ = .05). However, need for power has a significant relationship with informal accountability for others only when there is felt accountable mediate the two variables, F(2, 200) = 5.8, p < .05 (ꞵ = .30). The same was observed with other two previous needs.

**Table 5**. Regression Analysis

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Beta value | Sig. |
| Need for achievement | 0.359 | 0 |
| Need for affiliation | 0.121 | 0.209 |
| Need for power | 0.243 | 0.008 |
|  |  |  |
| *R2* = 0.244 |
| *F* = 10.622, *p* = 0.00 |

From table 5 above, need for achievement has the greatest value of (b = 0.359, *p* < .05) followed the need for power (b = 0.243, *p* < .05) and the need for affiliation (b = 0.121, *p* < .05). From these figures, we could conclude that need for achievement with its significant value of 0 has the perfect and strongest relationship with the independent variable which is informal accountability for others. Therefore, the most influencing need that affects the felt accountability and subsequently improves informal accountability for others among civil servants at the Social Security Organisation Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur is need for achievement. Therefore, all the hypotheses presented are accepted.

**6 Discussion**

Feeling accountable is strongly linked to the personal values that one holds in their lives. [6] further strengthened this statement by stating that individuals with high achievement need want praises and feedback for being accountable [6]. Moreover, managers that have high achievement need will usually expect their employees to do the same [6]. Hence, informal accountability for others among employees could be practised better in the organisation as they are strongly supported by their managers.

From the mediation analysis conducted on employees at the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, there is a significant relationship between need for affiliation and informal accountability for others. People are very vital to individuals with high affiliation need [7]. This would explain how it mediates feeling accountable for employees with high need for affiliation into being accountability for other colleagues. [8] believe that these individuals seem to seek informal accountability for others as a way to improve the quality of their relationships with other colleagues.

Need for power is correlated to informal accountability for others (r = .342, p < .01) and having the smallest correlation with it compared to other needs shows that the variation in the context of accountability and power has shaped how these high-powered individuals react to accountability. [9] explain that this might be contributed to them being upset when they feel powerless or unable to deal with the physical and social demands of their surroundings. Hence, informal accountability for others’ concept is too vague to these high-powered individuals and limits its potential to be utilised by them. Besides, accountability may encourage powerful individuals to be more careful in making decisions after considering potential consequences of their actions compared to their powerful counterparts who are not held accountable [10].

**7 Conclusion**

The study of accountability should not be limited to personality factors but it should be pursued in other fields such as the scientific field. Additionally, it is important that McClelland’s Theory of Needs is explored more under various other dimensions instead of just focusing it on the motivation factor. Therefore, it is important for the public sector to produce ethical public managers first before they could produce ethical civil servants. Several recommendations must be considered by the SOCSO Headquarters that will enhance their employees’ accountability. Scholars have agreed that the organisational climate could influence how employees act in their work culture [9] [10]. This includes how employees practice good governance values which include values such as transparency, integrity, and accountability which are entwined to each other closely. Public managers should play their roles proactively to instil informal accountability for others in every member of the organisation.

The result of this survey indicates that every need in McClelland’s Theory of Needs contributed to employees to feel individually accountable at varying degrees and it partially mediated the relationship between needs and informal accountability for others. The findings revealed that achievement need contributes the most to informal accountability for others at the SOCSO Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, followed by the need for power and the need for affiliation.

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