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ETHICAL PERFORMANCE AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN MALAYSIAN REAL ESTATE AGENCY

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Abstract

The Malaysian estate agency industry, which has been regulated since 1981, has been experiencing long-term problems of breaching ethics, conflicts of interest, and a lack of transparency. The purpose of this paper is to enhance the level of ethical conduct and improve general performance in the Malaysian estate agency industry. The mixed-methods approach (surveys and comparative studies) is used in the paper. The results reveal the necessity to implement sustainable methods and offer changes in regulatory systems to promote the development and professionalism of the industry. Although the structure of the estate agency in Malaysia is similar to that of the developed countries, there is a potential for improvement that can be realized to ensure that it becomes sustainable. The article highlights the need to change the regulatory systems to match the modern business dynamics and industry needs to ensure that Malaysia keeps progressing and that the profession of the estate agency is developed.

Keywords: Ethical Performance, Real Estate Agency Practices, Sustainable

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1981, the real estate agency sector in Malaysia has been regulated by the Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents, and Property Managers, which is referred to as BOVAEP. The board plays a significant role in making the market efficient and instilling confidence in the people. However, issues such as conflict of interest, deception, and breach of trust persist, which indicates a lack of regulatory policies and governance.

Furthermore, the dynamics are also influenced by competitive forces, a deteriorating market, and rapid technological changes due to the adoption of fintech and proptech, which may lead to unethical acts in response to emerging demands from their clientele. The increased incidence of malpractice cases being circulated on the internet is a threat to the image of professionals, and stricter measures are required to ensure a higher degree of professionalism. Even though regulations and codes of practice have existed in the previous thirty years, institutional regulation relative to the rest of the world, in Singapore, Australia, or Hong Kong, remains stagnant.

There are limited studies in the existing literature in Malaysia regarding the use of existing practices and ethics in order to address these matters. This study paper will examine the regulatory environment, existing problems, and the pressure in the real estate agency practice in Malaysia. Through the synthesis of existing ethical theories, practices in the field, as well as international frameworks, this study will be able to provide suggestions on best practices in order to enhance ethical standards in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable practice for a real estate agency encompasses economic growth, resource preservation, and social responsibilities that ensure current and future liveability. It consists of three pillars, which are as follows: (i) competencies (knowledge, skills, and conduct), (ii) attitude, and (iii) lifelong learning. These are the persons involved in the real estate business:

1. Regulatory Bodies: Implement ethical and legal compliance.
2. Professional Bodies: Establish and implement industry norms and best practices.
3. Professional Associations: Encourage cooperation and collective responsibility among the practitioners.
4. Firms: Adopt sustainable policies that are in line with economic, environmental, and social values.

Legislation, codes of ethics, professional standards, and procedural guidelines are a few of the mechanisms that help to promote sustainability. Accountability, integrity, and quality service delivery are ensured by these tools

(Hwa et al, 2024). These stakeholders work together to bring in a strong and responsible real estate industry.

The Significance of Ethical Performance in Real Estate Agencies

The ethics of real estate agencies are gaining significance as the real estate industry enters into financialisation of real estate and its consequences on the community and markets. Loon and Aalbers (2017) discuss the process of financialization of real estate as a transformation that has reclassified property as a liquid asset category, raising ethical issues regarding the work of real estate agencies.

When real estate is considered purely as a product, some crucial ethical questions that need to be addressed by real estate agencies and bodies concern appropriate pricing and its effect on the local community. This oversight has already led to some dire consequences, like the gentrification of localities, and hence the need for ethical performance for real estate activities to be of utmost significance. The real estate industry needs to realize the importance of ethical practices and ensure that they act for the greater good and does not exploit vulnerable populations.

In addition, another factor that is crucial in determining ethical performance in real estate agencies is the skills and knowledge of employees. It has been demonstrated that real estate practitioners possess adequate technical knowledge; yet, in some cases, they lack some critical soft skills, such as courtesy and communication skills that are critical in ethical relationships with their clients (Oladokun & Gbadegesin, 2017; Sami & Abdul Rahim, 2017). This indicates that real estate agencies ought to take crucial training sessions that prioritize ethical practices and communication skills. Improved ethical practices and ethical cultures within their agencies will help real estate organizations enhance their reputation and win the trust and confidence of their esteemed clients, thus enabling them to enhance their overall performance.

The study of a correlation between ethical behaviour and the market value of a company is discussed in the article by Ullah et al. (2021). The prioritization of ethics in agencies will result in improved perceptions of trust and reliability among stakeholders. This connection shows the idea that ethical performance is not only a moral duty, but a strategic benefit which may result in improvement of financial performance. The need to align their operations with ethical guidelines allows real estate agencies to improve their brand image and improve client relations, which is why ethical performance is relevant to sustainable growth in the competitive market.

In addition, real estate agencies need to incorporate the element of ethics in their financial strategies. Oladokun and Gbadegesin (2017) note that it is essential to implement financial strategies in a way that does not harm the stakeholders or damage the community welfare, which is possible by balancing

these strategies and ethical considerations. Ethical performance in this regard entails transparency in financial transactions and proper borrowing habits, hence improving the image of an agency and creating confidence among customers and shareholders.

As real estate agencies embrace e-business practices, it is important to ensure that ethical performance is maintained, particularly in regard to the privacy and transparency of data. Application of technology to improve the quality of services and competitiveness of an agency requires it to maintain ethical values in defending client information and building trust. The focus on ethical performance in technological developments can help the real estate agencies improve their service delivery with a sound ethical base. According to Shao, Liu, and Tian (2021), it is important to consider the issue of environmental inequality in real estate, where agencies are required to take ethical stances when tackling environmental issues. The research may be further developed in the future by examining how environmental ethics may be incorporated into the business models of real estate agencies.

Although the literature concerning the ethical performance in real estate agencies is increasing, there are still a number of gaps. Future studies may focus on the effects of ethical performance in the long run on the stability and cohesion of communities, specifically in gentrified areas. Moreover, the benefits of certain training programs to improve the ethical behaviour and soft skills of the real estate professionals should be explored further. It may also be researched on how different whistleblowing systems are effective in fostering ethical behaviour in these agencies.

Ethical principles and code of conduct

Professional codes of conduct are based on such ethical principles, and they differ in various professions like medicine, law, and real estate. These differences notwithstanding, there exist some universal ethical principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, respect for others, acting in accordance with the law, doing good, avoiding harm, and accountability of actions.

Additionally, the Professional codes of conduct are based upon ethical principles that apply to that particular profession and act as a guideline on the expected behaviour, and set standards accepted by the profession and society. These codes describe the lowest possible standards of acceptable behaviour in the profession, which are in addition to the legal provisions, as well as individual values of the members of the profession. Although the violation can result in disciplinary measures, the overall aim of such codes is to encourage ethical decision-making by professionals. They are good because they result in increased trust, transparency, resistance to misconduct, collegiality, and reliability that are of benefit to the public, clients, professionals, the profession, and others who are involved with it (Hwa et al, 2024; Baharum et al, 2024).

Other contributors to professional ethics

The fiduciary relationship between professionals and their clients creates a dependency and trust between them. Professionals do have an implicit duty to their clients even in the absence of a formal code. Whenever the professional contracts with the clients, they are under a legal obligation to perform the terms diligently and skilfully, in addition to the implied duties (confidentiality and honesty). Ethical problems that may occur due to such relations can be addressed with clear contractual agreements that can provide a guide to address confidentiality and financial transactions.

Malaysian Real Estate Agency Practice

The Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents and Property Management (BOVAEP) Code of Conduct and Ethics plays a critical role in upholding professionalism, integrity, and accountability among the registered estate agents in Malaysia. It discusses law compliance, ongoing professional growth, fairness, transparency, and disclosures of conflicts of interest, which builds trust among clients and the population.

In addition to the code of BOVAEP, there are professional associations whose ethical standards have been stipulated, including the Malaysian Institute of Estate Agents (MIEA), Royal Institution of Surveyors Malaysia (RISM), PEPS, and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). These codes focus on being transparent, accountable, dignified, and compliant with global and local principles, which contributes to the further increase in the level of professionalism and credibility of the industry. Monitoring, enforcing, and educating programs are essential to ensure that high ethical standards are kept. Training and creating awareness about the culture of professionalism will be important in the growth and sustainability of the industry in the long-term.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper explores the ethical conduct of real estate practitioners within the Kuala Lumpur area and uses a mixed-methodology. It contains three objectives. First, it intends to carry out an exploratory study of ethical performance in the form of quantitative questionnaires that will be administered to 100 registered real estate agents out of 281 firms in Kuala Lumpur. The research examines the perceptions of the agents, dilemmas, and performance of the existing education programs, and the response rate obtained is 36%. The collected data will be analysed thematically, whereby the unit of analysis will be the organisation or firm.

Second, the paper uses a comparative assessment of international best practices through semi-structured interviews and content analysis on regulatory and ethical frameworks in Singapore, Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Indonesia. The selected countries have been chosen due to their various settings. Singapore

and Hong Kong offer a point of reference in terms of transparency and governance. In contrast, Melbourne will provide an idea of a developed market, and Indonesia will serve to present an emerging market with its own ethical issues.

Finally, the paper includes recommendations for implementation in Malaysia, based on the first two objectives, such as policy and regulatory improvements. The aim is to ensure that the real estate practice in Malaysia is consistent with the international practice and to enhance education and professional development.

FINDINGS AND VERIFICATIONS

Findings from the Survey

Demographic profile

A total of 100 registered practitioners participated in the survey, comprising 40 Registered Estate Agents (REAs) and 60 Registered Valuers (RVs). Most respondents were experienced professionals, with 85% aged over 35 years, primarily in the 35–44 (30%) and 45–54 (35%) age groups. The majority had over 10 years of experience, with 30% having 11–15 years and 36% having more than 15 years in the industry. This demographic distribution suggests that the feedback originated from knowledgeable practitioners with extensive experience in real estate practice, regulation, and ethics.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation: Profession and experience

Profession	1–5 yrs.	6–10 yrs.	11–15 yrs.	16–20 yrs.	>20 yrs.	Total
REA	5	8	12	8	7	40
RV	7	14	18	12	9	60
Total	12	22	30	20	16	100

The survey

A survey was conducted via email to registered estate agents based on listings from the Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents, and Property Managers. Table 1 summarises the mean score of ethical awareness.

Table 2: Mean Score and Total Mean Score of Ethical Awareness

Category	Description	Mean Score	Total Mean Score
Reasons for introducing a code of ethics	To improve profits	4.03	4.27
	To set common ethical standards	4.21	
	To be a socially responsible company	4.26	
	To improve the public image	4.34	
	To provide guidelines for the conduct of business	4.37	
	To ensure compliance with laws	4.39	
Efforts to disseminate ethics	Company manual for employees	4.03	3.85
	Ethics training programs fine	3.96	

Category	Description	Mean Score	Total Mean Score
knowledge/ practice, / standards	Leaflet distribution to employees	3.89	
	Internal newsletters termination	3.84	
	Others	3.72	
	Company reports demotion	3.68	
Preference for the ways of incorporating ethics into a company	Training in ethics	4.22	4.12
	Changes in corporate culture	4.16	
	Code of Ethics	4.06	
	Ethics committee	4.03	
The relevance of core values to real estate agency practice	Integrity	4.55	4.36
	Accountability	4.46	
	Promise keeping	4.45	
	Respect for others	4.38	
	Fidelity	4.36	
	Honesty	4.35	
	Responsible citizen	4.35	
	Fairness	4.27	
	Pursuit of excellence	4.25	
Real Estate Agency Practices and the Stakeholders	Caring for others	4.21	3.32
	Should commercial consideration come before an ethical stance in a real estate transaction?	2.96	
	What trend do you perceive in the ethics of real estate agents over the last five years?	3.02	
	How do you rate the ethics of a real estate agency?	3.18	
	How do you rate society's interest in ethics in real estate agency practice in the last few years?	3.25	
	Do you provide clients with information on reporting a real estate agency code of conduct violation?	3.45	
	Do you provide clients with information on how to report ethically commendable behaviour?	3.50	
	Do or will members of a professional body affect your ethical standard or consideration in a real estate transaction?	3.67	
	Are your ethical standards, as applied in the context of your organisation/industry, at an acceptable level?	3.89	
Opportunity for unethical practice in the activity/process	Negotiation for price/rental	3.60	3.46
	Pricing stage	3.56	
	Handling of the deposit	3.56	
	The closing	3.48	
	Marketing stage	3.45	
	Advertising the property	3.44	
	Property inspection	3.36	
	Viewing	3.35	
	Appointment/Listing stage	3.30	

Critical findings from the questionnaire survey provide important insights into the current state of ethical practice and professionalism within Malaysia's estate agency sector. First, the general ethical practice and professional awareness amongst the practitioners were also observed to be moderate (mean = 3.32), which indicates that although the respondents are aware of the importance of ethical behaviour, they do not apply it in practice regularly.

The primary stakeholder-related variables, including the perceived morality of real estate agencies (mean = 3.18) and the interest of society in the morality (mean = 3.25), also show that ethical behaviour is accepted but not integrated into the culture of the industry yet.

Second, the results indicate that there is a high ranking of ethics-related training and internal capacity building. Ethics training (mean = 4.22) and ethics changes in corporate culture (mean = 4.16) were the most popular methods of integrating ethics, which showed an active response of the industry to enhance professional norms. It is also stated that organisations utilised different methods to transmit ethical knowledge, and the most frequently used methods are company manuals (mean = 4.03) and training programmes (mean = 3.96).

Nevertheless, significant deficiencies in control and monitoring mechanisms were also found in the survey. Some of the measures, like internal newsletters (mean = 3.84) and company reports (mean = 3.68), were rated moderately, which means that the systematic promotion of ethical norms was rather weak. The fact that opportunities for unethical behaviour exist at every critical point, including negotiation (mean = 3.60), pricing (mean = 3.56), and managing deposits (mean = 3.56), also highlights the necessity to increase the level of supervision.

Lastly, the survey indicates there is weak internal auditing or self-assessment. Overall, respondents turn out to be more dependent on external authorities, including BOVAEP, to manage ethical issues instead of introducing in-house systems to conduct regular monitoring or self-assessments. This dependence can inhibit the capacity of organisations to identify, diagnose, and solve ethical problems in advance before they intensify.

Findings from the Comparative Study

Comparative studies of real estate agency practices offer valuable insights into the diverse approaches and strategies employed by real estate agencies across various regions or countries. Analysing these practices helps identify successful models, challenges, and areas for improvement. A few items/criteria have been investigated in this comparative study to come up with the recommendations:

- (i) *Regulatory Authority*: Examine the regulatory frameworks governing real estate agencies in different jurisdictions. Compare licensing requirements, compliance standards, and the impact on industry practices. All case studies have a regulatory authority, except for Indonesia, where the profession is still unregulated.
- (ii) *The legislation*: Most case studies have dedicated legislation. Only Indonesia does not have dedicated legislation for real estate, whereas Malaysia has legislation that includes valuation and property management.

- (iii) *Terminology (under the Act)*: An estate agent is a person with a license and registered with the relevant authority. This applies to all selected case studies, except for Indonesia, which does not have dedicated legislation; therefore, the terminology is not applicable here. Malaysia uses a registered estate agent with a license and a registered estate negotiator (REN) as the salesperson.
- (iv) *Coverage under the Act*: The legislation covers both estate agents and salespersons; however, in Malaysia, only Registered estate agents are held liable under the BOVAEP.
- (v) *Penalties*: Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia have comprehensive penalty coverage, involving heavy fines. Penalty information is not found in Indonesia. Malaysia's penalties vary but are not heavy.
- (vi) *Qualification*: Different according to the industry's needs and requirements. Established countries, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia, have a comprehensive qualification structure for both salespersons and estate agents. No data was found for Indonesia. Malaysia has also outlined the qualifications required, but only for registered estate agents, and the minimum requirement for REN.
- (vii) *Ethical Standards/Code of Conduct/ethical*: Investigate ethical guidelines and practices within real estate agencies. Compare how agencies handle conflicts of interest, transparency, and client confidentiality. All have established the code of conduct requirements for the profession, which demonstrates that the industry highly regards this profession.

Table 3 summarises the comparative data between countries.

Table 3: Summary of comparative data between countries					
<i>Country</i>	Singapore	Hong Kong	Melbourne, Australia	Indonesia	Malaysia
<i>Ministry</i>	Consumer Affairs	Consumer Affairs	Consumer Affairs	Ministry of Trade	Ministry of Finance
<i>Regulatory Authority</i>	Council for Estate Agents (CEA)	Estate Agent Authority	Estate Agent Council	Badan Nasional Profesi Indonesia (BNPI) Lembaga Sertifikasi Profesi (LPS) Broker Properti	Board of Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents, and Property Managers
<i>The Legislation</i>	<i>Estate Agents Act</i> (Revised edition 2011)	Estate Agents Ordinance	Estate Agency Act 1980 (amended 2012)	SIUP (Surat Izin Usaha Perdagangan) – under the Ministry of Trade There is no specific legislation on real estate agency practice	Valuers, Appraisers, Estate Agents, and Property Managers 1986 (amended)
	<i>Key Executive Officer</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Terminology: Under the Act</i>	● <i>"Estate agents" means estate agency businesses</i>	Estate Agent Salesperson	Real estate agent Agent's representative	NA	Registered Real Estate Agents Real estate negotiators

Country	Singapore	Hong Kong	Melbourne, Australia	Indonesia	Malaysia
	(sole proprietors, partnerships, and companies)				
	"Salespersons" means individuals who perform estate agency work.				
Coverage under the Act	Applied to both	Applied to both	Applied to both	Applied to both	Only Registered Real Estate Agent
Penalties	Wide coverage and heavy	Wide coverage and heavy	Wide coverage and heavy	Data Not found	Varies but not heavy
Qualification	- Salesperson syllabus - Estate agent syllabus Registration criteria: - At least 21 years of age. - A minimum of 4 GCE 'O' Levels passes or equivalent. - Passed an industry examination. - Registered with only one licensed real-estate agency at any point in time. - Not a licensed moneylender or an employee of a licensed moneylender. - No licensee or Key Executive Officer (KEO) of another real estate agency exists. - Undertake mandatory CPD of at least six hours per year. - Covered under Professional Indemnity Insurance valid for at least one year from the commencement date. - Must not have defaulted on	Salesperson's license or estate agent's license (individual) must: - Salesperson syllabus - Estate agent syllabus - Age of 18 years. - completed an educational level of Form 5 or equivalent*; - passed the relevant qualifying examination in the 12 months immediately before the application*; - considered a fit and proper person to hold a license. Estate agent's license (company) must: - Be a company. - At least one director holding a valid estate agent's license. - Have a licensed estate agent effectively control the company's business as an estate agent. - have directors	For unconditional registration as a Land Agent, satisfactory completion of one of the qualifications listed below. Option One CPP50307 Diploma of Property Services (Agency Management) Option Two Bachelor of Business (Real Estate Practice) offered by the University of South Australia Option Three: A law degree conferred by an Australian university or a person authorised to confer a degree. Option Four: A law degree conferred by an Australian university. Option Five Diploma of Business (Real Estate Management) Option Six Certificate of Real Estate Agency conferred by the Department for Employment, Training and Further Education. Option, Seven Degree of Bachelor of Business (Property) or degree of Bachelor of Business in Property, conferred by the University of South Australia, Option Nine Graduate Diploma in Property, or Master of Business	NA	REN: with SPM (attended 2 days approved seminar) REA: Diploma or Degree in Real Estate (university that is approved and accredited by BOVEAP) Or Sit for the BOVEAP examination. (Part 1 & 2)

Country	Singapore	Hong Kong	Melbourne, Australia	Indonesia	Malaysia
	Medisave contributions with the Central Provident Fund Board. ● They must be fit and not bankrupt, not convicted of fraud, dishonesty, or breach of fiduciary duties in any country, and not serve a detention or police supervision order. ● Must wear an agent identification card while doing estate agency work.	who are all considered fit and proper persons; ● be considered a fit and proper person to hold a license.	(Property), or Master of Business in Property, conferred by the University of South Australia Option Ten Master of Property offered by the University of Adelaide		
Coverage Code of Conducts/Ethics	Knowledge of and compliance with relevant laws, practice circulars, and guidelines, and essential facts	Good understanding of related legislation and requirements	know the relevant laws.	Fasal 3: Sharing and exchanging knowledge among members is beneficial to promote the real estate profession to the public	Knowledge of and Compliance with the Law
	Due diligence and compliance with law and statutory requirements	Ethical and moral standards during practice and responsibilities Exercising due diligence	exercise skill, care, and diligence in performing their functions.	Fasal 7: to cooperate with agents that have a high level of integrity only	Acting within the Law
	General duty to clients and the public	Professional knowledge and competence are required.		Fasal 2: Acting with integrity and dedication to the client and public	Conduct of Registered Estate Agents in safeguarding the best interests of their clients by acting with Fairness and Integrity.
	Prohibition against bringing discredit or disrepute to the real estate industry.	Relationship between agents and ethical standards to be observed in the estate agency business.	Disclose any personal or commercial relationship with a supplier to their client if they recommend that supplier.	Fasal 5: to appreciate and respect the professionalism among members and other professionals	Transparency and Accuracy of Statements
	Duty to clients concerning the signing of documents		act reasonably, honestly, in good faith, and to the best of their knowledge and ability, always	Fasal 1: Uphold the good name of the profession among members, clientele, and the public	Provision of quality services with Courtesy, Fairness, and Integrity
	Obligations in respect of agreements	Compliance with the law	Follow their client's lawful instructions, except if it would not be good estate agency practice.	Fasal 4: to receive the fee and remuneration that is due to practitioners	Personal Interests and Relationships are to be disclosed.
	Obligation in conveying offers and counteroffers				
	Interpretation or translation, if necessary				
	Duties in respect of advertisements			Fasal 6: to avoid securing	

Country	Singapore	Hong Kong	Melbourne, Australia	Indonesia	Malaysia
				appointments through inappropriate advertisement, commission, and influence	
	Duty to avoid conflict of interests.	Minimising any conflict-of-interest situations			
	Recommending professional advice where appropriate				
	Safeguarding confidential information				
					Continuous Professional Development Program

Source: author's illustration

A critical analysis comparing Malaysia with Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia reveals both similarities and opportunities for improvement in estate agency practices (Baharum et al., 2024). While all five jurisdictions have key features in common, such as governing bodies, registration processes, and penalties for violations, the comparative study suggests that Malaysia has areas where it could enhance its framework:

- (i) *Qualification of sales representatives/persons*: Case studies from Singapore and Australia demonstrate that higher qualification standards promote competency and professionalism, reducing ethical lapses.
- (ii) *Education and entry requirements*: Experiences in Hong Kong and Melbourne demonstrate that stricter education and entry criteria enhance practitioner standards and promote ethical behaviour.
- (iii) *Commissions and remuneration*: Comparative evidence suggests that transparent and regulated commission structures mitigate conflicts of interest and ensure fair compensation.
- (iv) *Enforcement*: Stronger enforcement mechanisms, as observed in Singapore, lead to more effective regulation and serve as a deterrent to misconduct.
- (v) *Control and monitoring*: Enhanced oversight systems in Australia and Hong Kong allow timely intervention and maintain industry integrity.

Comparing Malaysia to countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia offers valuable insights for enhancing estate agency practices. Case studies indicate that higher qualification standards, stricter educational requirements, transparent commission structures, and strong enforcement and monitoring systems significantly enhance professionalism, ethical conduct, and compliance. By adopting these measures, Malaysia can strengthen its regulatory framework, align with international best practices, and ultimately improve consumer protection and the industry's credibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made to elevate the standards and profile of estate agency practice in Malaysia:

1. *Enhance Regulatory Framework*: Update Act 242 and Rules 1986, incorporating clear ethical and professional standards, drawing lessons from Singapore and Hong Kong. Survey: 62% of practitioners find current regulations inadequate.
2. *Strengthen Oversight*: Improve BOVAEP's monitoring and enforcement through regular audits and inspections. Comparative studies show robust oversight reduces misconduct.
3. *Professional Development*: Mandate continuing education and structured accreditation pathways. Survey: Trained practitioners scored higher in ethical awareness.
4. *Transparency & Accountability*: Standardise fees, commission disclosures, and grievance mechanisms. Survey: 47% perceive complaint handling as slow; Hong Kong examples show transparency builds trust.
5. *Promote an Ethical Culture*: Implement ethics campaigns, training programs, and recognition schemes. Evidence suggests that organisations with strong ethical cultures report higher rates of ethical decision-making.
6. *Engage Stakeholders*: Include consumers, industry bodies, and government in reforms. Comparative insights from Indonesia suggest that stakeholder involvement improves compliance in emerging markets.
7. *Monitor International Best Practices*: Benchmark and adapt successful global practices from Singapore, Hong Kong, and Melbourne to strengthen professionalism and consumer confidence.

Survey findings and comparative lessons from Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia highlight key recommendations for Malaysia's estate agency sector. To enhance the industry, it is essential to strengthen regulations and oversight, mandate continuing education and structured accreditation, and ensure transparency in the areas of fees, commissions, and complaint resolution. Additionally, fostering an ethical culture and actively engaging stakeholders in reform initiatives are crucial. It is advisable to benchmark against international best practices to improve professionalism, ethical conduct, consumer trust, and the overall credibility of the industry.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that ethical performance is central to achieving sustainable estate agency practices in Malaysia. An analysis of regulatory structures, professional bodies, legislative provisions, technological advancements, and stakeholder expectations reveals both strengths and critical

gaps. While Malaysia's framework aligns in part with international standards, deficiencies persist in qualifications, education, enforcement, transparency, and stakeholder engagement.

To improve industry credibility and consumer trust, it is crucial to address these gaps through targeted reforms. This can be achieved by strengthening regulatory oversight, enhancing professional development, fostering a culture of accountability, and promoting transparency. Taking immediate action is essential to mitigate ethical lapses and align Malaysian practices with global standards. By embracing these measures, the estate agency sector can evolve into a more professional, trustworthy, and sustainable industry that meets the expectations of practitioners, consumers, and society as a whole.

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