

# Unlocking the Potential of Innovative Work Behaviour on Academic Staff Performance: Evidence from Malaysian Public Universities

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**Abstract:** In Malaysian universities, academic staff play a crucial and vital role in improving their performance by utilising creative and innovative abilities. Therefore, the primary purpose of this research study was to examine and investigate the impact of innovative work behaviour on academic staff performance in Malaysian research universities. A survey was conducted among 300 business faculty members, who were requested to complete a set of questionnaires to achieve the study's objective. The data collected from the survey were meticulously analysed using two software programmes, namely SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4. The study's findings revealed a significant positive association between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance in Malaysian research universities. These research findings not only contribute significantly to the existing literature on innovative work practices among university academics but also offer potential strategies that could enhance academic staff performance levels. Thus, universities in Malaysia are recommended to focus on creating an environment that fosters innovation and encourages academic staff to engage in innovative work behaviour. Such initiatives can significantly impact their performance and contribute to the institution's overall success.

**Keywords:** *Innovative work behaviour, academic staff performance, public university, Malaysia*

## 1. Introduction

Higher education institutes (HEIs) hold great significance as they play an essential role in students' lives by offering a wide range of experiences and challenges that significantly contribute to developing skills and competencies [1]. Additionally, HEIs provide valuable opportunities for academics to gain experience in lecturing and administrative tasks, which can significantly enhance their professional growth and development [2]. Besides, HEIs also have a crucial and pivotal role in achieving a country's development goals, as these institutions are responsible for cultivating a skilled and competent workforce that is essential for the country's economic, social, and political growth and

development [3]. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge the vital role of HEIs in shaping a country's future and providing opportunities for students and academics to grow and contribute to society.

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, HEIs are acutely aware that education is a service industry [1]. Consequently, they have become increasingly focused on meeting the changing expectations and needs of their primary clientele, who are none other than the students [4]. In light of this, HEIs have recognised the need to develop innovative and unique strategies that distinguish them from their competitors in the highly competitive education market [5]. These strategies can be achieved by providing

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exceptional services and an unparalleled educational experience to their students [6]. Thus, it has become imperative for HEIs to continuously invest in improving their service quality, delivering personalised learning experiences, and leveraging cutting-edge technologies to deliver superior educational outcomes [1]. By prioritising these goals, HEIs can remain competitive and meet students' ever-evolving needs in today's rapidly changing educational environment.

Malaysia is home to 20 public universities known for their exceptional provision of high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. These universities also offer foundation studies and certificate programmes designed to prepare students for the university experience [6]. Admission to these prestigious public universities is highly competitive. Candidates are expected to have an excellent academic record, good SPM grades and higher certifications. Notably, Malaysian public universities are categorised into three distinct types: research universities, focused universities, and comprehensive universities [7]. Each of these types of universities has its own specific objectives, goals, and classifications that must be considered when making important decisions regarding academic pursuits and future career paths [7]. Hence, students aspiring to enrol in one of these esteemed Malaysian public universities must conduct comprehensive research, analyse their academic strengths and weaknesses, and carefully evaluate which type of university best suits their needs, interests, and career aspirations [7].

The Malaysian government is steadfastly dedicated to providing its students with the best possible higher education available globally. Therefore, it has implemented a multitude of innovative and revolutionary initiatives [6]. These programmes are designed to produce well-rounded graduates with a competitive edge in critical areas such as entrepreneurship, leadership, and others, enabling them to succeed in their chosen fields and contribute significantly to the country's development [6].

Due to the comprehensive and forward-thinking initiatives taken by the Malaysian government, Malaysian public universities have shown remarkable performance. They are widely acknowledged as some of the region's best and most prestigious institutions [6]. This achievement is clearly evidenced in Table 1.1, which lists the QS World University Rankings 2023. The table highlights the impressive rankings achieved by top public universities such as the University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), thereby providing a testament to the effectiveness and success of the government's concerted efforts.

Table 1.1 QS World University Rankings 2023

Public Universities	Rankings
Universiti Malaya (UM)	70
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	123
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	129
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	143

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	203
Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	481
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	651-700
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	651-700
Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)	801-1000
Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)	801-1000
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	801-1000
Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	1001-1200
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)	1001-1200
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	1001-1200
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)	1001-1200

These public universities have earned widespread recognition and are highly esteemed for their exceptional academic standards. They consistently demonstrate excellence through innovative teaching methodologies, groundbreaking research, and state-of-the-art facilities [8]. Furthermore, their exceptional rankings on the QS World University Rankings 2023 serve as a testament to their steadfast commitment to excellence. These rankings highlight their continuous efforts to enhance and refine the quality of higher education in Malaysia while also elevating Malaysia's presence on the global education map.

The five most prominent public universities in Malaysia are highly esteemed and considered to be in the top tier of research universities. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has acknowledged these universities for their focus on academic activities, research and development education (R&D), and dedication to knowledge advancement in Malaysia [6]. This strategy is viewed as an effective means of boosting the country's competitiveness and leadership in a knowledge-based economy [3]. As a part of their objectives, research universities aim to increase the number of registered postgraduate and postdoctoral students, PhD holders among academics, and international students enrolled. Furthermore, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education expects these universities to achieve a high ranking among the world's universities. University Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) are some of the most prominent and distinguished research universities in Malaysia.

Academic staff members at research universities are required to adhere to the universities' vision, mission, and goals, which serve as guiding principles for their academic activities and R&D [9]. On the other hand, academic staff members at public universities must also achieve their Key Performance Indicators (KPI), which align with the national agenda of the National Higher Education Strategy Plan (PSPTN) [9]. As the most valuable asset in HEIs, academic staff members play a crucial role in achieving the institution's objectives [10]. Therefore, assessing the academic staff members' performance is critical to

improving their commitment to learning activities, cultivating strong relationships with students, and establishing a challenging and supportive learning environment that fosters students' academic growth and success [10].

Academic staff members are required to undertake a multitude of responsibilities that go beyond the conventional expectations of teaching [11]. In addition to their primary duties of delivering lectures and conducting face-to-face classes, these individuals are also responsible for various administrative tasks, such as preparing budget proposals, reports, and strategic plans [10]. Moreover, academic staff members are expected to engage in research and publish scholarly work to advance their careers and provide academic consultation to struggling students [11]. Besides these responsibilities, academic staff members are also expected to participate in extracurricular activities to contribute to the overall development of the university community [10]. Consequently, the academic staff members' duties at public universities are multifaceted and varied.

The importance of academic staff performance has garnered significant interest among scholars and practitioners due to its immense significance [10]. Governments globally place great emphasis on education, particularly at the university level, recognising universities as crucial academic and scientific institutions that play a pivotal role in promoting social and economic development [12]. As the academic staff's performance substantially impacts a university's overall performance, their ability to advance and contribute to society is dubitable [13]. Additionally, an improved academic staff performance can bolster organisational performance [11], further emphasising its importance as a research area. Given these factors, it is evident that the significance of academic staff performance cannot be overstated and warrants further investigation.

Recently, scholars have emphasised the importance of leadership in influencing innovative work behaviour [14]. In the workplace, innovation is a fundamental aspect of high-performing organisations [15], especially in higher education, where fostering and disseminating innovation is essential [16]. Previous research has indicated that innovative work behaviour can lead to enhanced academic staff performance. This behaviour involves generating and implementing ideas, leading to improved staff performance [16, 17]. Thus, investigating the relationship between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance is crucial to gain insights into the factors affecting academic staff's ability to perform optimally.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Innovative Work Behaviour**

Innovative work behaviour is a multi-stage process that involves generating novel and useful ideas, their intentional introduction, and their utilisation to enhance workplace, group, or organisational performance [18, 19]. It is widely recognised as a crucial component for organisations to achieve long-term success in innovation [20]. The innovative work behaviour process stages include idea production, idea promotion, and concept realisation [21, 22]. Depending on the context, this cognitive and physical activity can be performed either individually or collaboratively to foster innovation development [23]. Thus, innovative work behaviour is a complex and dynamic process requiring individual and collective efforts, organisational support, and resources to promote innovation and improve performance [18].

Staff who exhibit innovative work behaviour not only contribute to enhancing their work environment but also remain open to integrating feedback from their peers or external sources [24]. Academic staff members in HEIs are required to demonstrate creativity and develop innovative solutions for their academic tasks [11]. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the emphasis on innovation alone may not suffice in institutions prioritising performance over the staff's mental health and well-being, as it can lead to plagiarism and fraud [24]. Therefore, it is critical for HEIs to promote a balanced approach that values innovation while also prioritising staff's mental health and well-being, as neglecting the latter can have detrimental consequences [24].

### **2.2 Academic Staff's Performance**

Performance measurement is an essential tool for enhancing firm value and improving decision-making processes [25]. One of the variables that can influence an organisation's performance and outcomes is innovation [26]. Performance is becoming increasingly significant in today's competitive environment due to its ability to improve an organisation's effectiveness and efficiency [27]. In order to ensure effective performance measurement, it is essential to establish cause and effect linkages between the metrics and consider past and expected future performance by incorporating both leading and lagging indicators [28]. Similarly, taking a collaborative approach that considers both past and future performance is crucial when assessing academic staff performance.

Improving tertiary education institutions worldwide is crucial for promoting equitable access to education [21]. Therefore, any initiatives aimed at enhancing the performance of lecturers in these institutions must be handled with care [21]. "The Ministry of Education has introduced new requirements mandating that academic staff in public universities conduct internal performance measurements. Malaysia has been using performance indicators since implementing the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020 [9]. Evaluating

teaching and learning outcomes carefully and consistently is necessary to assess academic achievement. Thus, institutions can enhance education quality and improve the overall performance of academic staff.

Public universities in Malaysia are accountable to the government and the public for improving their performance in line with national reform efforts [29]. In order to achieve this goal, evaluating the teaching performance of academic staff is crucial as it can enhance their dedication to teaching and strengthen their rapport with students, ultimately leading to a stimulating and supportive learning environment [10]. As students rely heavily on lecturers to impart knowledge during their educational experiences, improving the academic staff's teaching effectiveness is paramount.

Academic staff working in Malaysian public universities are assigned specific salary bands under the Malaysian Remuneration System (MRS) [9]. Effective academic staff members take time to reflect on their job to understand themselves and their students [10]. The critical examination of academic staff performance assists in developing unique ideas for their lecture activities. In order to improve individual and organisational performance, incentives are offered, with individual job performance determining promotion and salary [9].

The responsibility of public service for lecturers is intrinsically linked to their institution and their capability to adapt to new teaching methods and concepts that cater to the students' varied requirements [29]. Hence, it is imperative for academic staff members to embrace and incorporate innovative and creative approaches in their teaching practices to improve teaching effectiveness and foster positive student learning outcomes [21].

In the education realm, the degree of innovation is heavily influenced by the behaviours exhibited by academic staff, including their inclination towards self-education, the utilisation of sophisticated problem-solving strategies, and their adeptness at effective communication [29]. The willingness of academic staff members to engage in innovative activities, known as innovative work behaviour, constitutes a crucial factor in the progress of educational institutions and the overall education system [30, 31]. By establishing a dynamic and supportive work environment that fosters academic staff's innovative behaviour in accordance with organisational support theory, a robust innovation network can be created within universities that can lead to greater performance [32]. Hence, it is imperative to encourage innovative work behaviour as a part of academic staff's professional development to improve their performance.

Hence, the following research question is derived from this literature:

*RQ: Is there a relationship between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance?*

### 3. METHODS

The primary objective of this study is to investigate research universities in Malaysia which are recognised as prominent public universities within the country. The study focuses on academic staff members from the University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), who constitute the target population.

In order to determine the sample size, Raosoft's Sample Size Calculator was utilised, which suggested a sample size of 264. Thus, a random sample of at least 264 academics from the business faculty of research universities, out of a total population of 9,727 university academics, was selected to participate in the study. The questionnaire was distributed through email to the respective email accounts of the university lecturers. Nevertheless, a total of 701 academics received the online questionnaires. Out of those who received the questionnaire, only 300 academics completed it.

The scales and measures utilised in this study were developed based on existing literature and field evaluations. A brief overview of the scales used for each construct is provided in the subsequent paragraphs. The developed questionnaire assessed the relationship between innovative work behaviour and performance. The questionnaire included a seven-item scale [33], which measured the extent to which innovative work behaviour facilitates performance. The item on the scale included statements such as "I bring attention to issues that others do not typically address in the workplace" and "I systematically introduce innovative ideas into work practices." Participants were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Do not facilitate" to "Highly facilitate".

The academic staff's performance was measured through the use of a nine-item scale [34]. The scale aimed to assess academic staff performance based on various factors, including the extent to which they work in accordance with the university's vision and mission, their ability to maintain positive relationships with their colleagues, and their willingness to consider different perspectives while still holding their own views. Participants rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Agree" to indicate their level of agreement with each item.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to initiate the data screening process, the initial step consisted of importing the collected data into Microsoft Excel, followed by filtering to exclude response pairs with incomplete information, instances of

straight-lining, and any missing values. After the initial screening, the data was analysed using SPSS 26. Subsequently, the data was further analysed and interpreted using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. SmartPLS 4 software was employed to evaluate the measurement model analysis and structural model analysis.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With reference to Table 1.2, the study's outcomes indicate that a robust and positive correlation exists between the innovative work behaviour exhibited by academics and their performance, as evidenced by several statistical measures. Specifically, the beta value of 0.69, the t-value of 15.31, and the p-value of 0.000 all demonstrate a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. Additionally, the R<sup>2</sup> results of 0.45 suggest that a significant proportion of an academic's performance can be explained by their innovative work behaviour. Moreover, the f<sup>2</sup> value of 1.12 and Q<sup>2</sup> value of 0.36 further substantiate the conclusion that innovative work behaviour considerably impacts academic staff performance. Thus, the study effectively establishes and confirms the link between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance.

Table 1.2 Direct Relationship Results

Path	Beta (β)	T statistics	P-values	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
IWB - ASP	0.69	15.31	0.000	0.45	1.12	0.36

The significance of this research study in the human resources field cannot be overstated. It delves into the connection between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance in Malaysian research universities, a unique context that has received little attention in previous research. By concentrating on this particular population, this study offers valuable insights into the factors impacting the academic staff's performance, providing a better understanding of this area. The practical implications of the findings are noteworthy as they can serve as a foundation for university academics in Malaysian public universities to enhance their performance. Additionally, this study has the potential to influence future research on this topic, as it serves as a starting point for exploring the correlation between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance.

In the higher education realm, the significance of innovation cannot be overstated, as it plays a pivotal role in creating equal education opportunities. In addition, managing initiatives that focus on enhancing academic staff performance is essential. Therefore, this study aimed to encourage academics to increase their productivity by

fostering innovative work behaviour. Achieving this goal requires public universities to create an environment that supports innovation and enhances academic staff performance by providing opportunities for academics to experiment with novel approaches without overwhelming them. The study's findings can serve as a motivational tool for academics to engage in innovative work behaviour, which can substantially impact their performance and contribute to the institution's overall success.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study's importance and significance cannot be overstated, as it provides valuable and insightful contributions to the existing knowledge base concerning innovative work behaviour and its effect on the academic staff members' performance in Malaysian research universities. Although the study has some limitations, these limitations can be addressed in future research. The study's findings are instrumental in highlighting the importance of examining this vital topic in private and public universities. Researchers will gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance. This understanding is necessary for improving the quality of education and enhancing institutional performance.

After conducting a thorough and comprehensive analysis, the results obtained from this study unequivocally demonstrate the significant impact that innovative work behaviour exerts on academic staff performance. It is crucial to highlight that while this relationship exists, the high-performance expectations placed on research university academics may restrict their ability to work innovatively. Despite these challenges, exploring alternative ways of performing tasks can serve as a positive example for academics and contribute to their professional growth and development.

The acknowledgement of the critical and essential role played by Malaysian public universities towards the country's success is widely accepted. The international reputation of these institutions largely depends on the contributions and achievements of their academic staff, underscoring the importance of recognising their value and potential for innovation. In light of this, universities must provide the requisite support and resources to foster and encourage innovation among their academic staff.

In conclusion, the results have revealed an essential and groundbreaking connection between innovative work behaviour and academic staff performance. The study provides crucial and practical insights for academics to enhance their work and contribute towards Malaysian universities' overall success and growth. The findings of this research study can serve as a foundation for future research in the fields of human resources and higher education. The study can inspire universities to promote

innovation and support their academic staff in professional development to ensure long-term success.

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