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Proactivity Among Academicians In Malaysian Private Universities

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Abstract

The study examines demographic variables' role in academicians' proactive work behaviour (PWB) in private universities. Independent sample t-test and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were performed using self-reported data from 287 academicians. Results show that academicians demonstrated moderate proactivity level. Male demonstrate higher proactiveness compared to females. Married workers score higher on PWB. An academician who holds a managerial position tends to be more proactive compared to others. Furthermore, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) holder displays a higher level of productivity. The findings offer practical suggestions to the university to address the situation and delegate job assignments based on individual differences.

Keywords: proactive work behaviour; academicians; demographic variables; private university

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1.0 Introduction

The educational institution is considered a service industry that plays an important role in creating the intelligent, well-educated, first-class human capital mindset needed in this era. The massive growth in Malaysia's higher education over the past two decades has helped put Malaysia on the global playing field by offering higher education to an increasing number of Malaysian and international students. Quality education can only be achieved with excellent teachers. One of the key measures of a high-quality education institution is its academic staff's qualifications and research capacity. In this case, academic staff have a vital role in maintaining the quality of education as they have served as the basis for any progress in higher education institutions.

In reality, do the academicians in private universities proactive in their work? Hashim (2012) pointed out that academicians in private universities lack creativity, with a "work for living" attitude only and no self-initiating. While looking into the outcome of initiating innovation among the academicians in private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the research performance analysis of both public and private HEIs in Malaysia using the data from Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS databases (from the year 2014-2017) showed, very few of private HEIs have been able to list in the top 10 of total citations in WOS and SCOPUS databases if compared with public HEIs (Chik, Rouse, Jaafar, Ismail, Azmi, Ghazali & Ahmat, 2018).

Compared with other industry, academicians in higher education who have considerable autonomy in their work nature are expected to be held more accountable for their institute's performance. They are expected to identify problems, and initiate improvements in their performance before students' performances are adversely affected. In other words, their work's nature requires them to display proactive work behaviours that focus on initiating internal organisational change (Parker & Collins, 2010). Furthermore, research on the topic of

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employee's proactive work behaviour in Malaysia context is limited (Ling, Bandar, Alil, & Muda, 2017) and specified in proactive career behaviour (Rahim & Siti-Rohaida, 2016), proactive personality (Subramaniam, 2015), proactive service behaviour (Hamzah, Othman & Hassan, 2020) rather than proactive work behaviour. This motivates the present study to investigate the level of proactive work behaviour among the academicians in private universities in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature Review

Looking into the context of the study, academicians have high autonomy in their work nature and are held accountable for the performance of their institute. They are expected to identify problems, and initiate improvements in their performance before students' performances are adversely affected. Therefore, their work's nature requires them to display proactive work behaviours that focus on initiating internal organisational change (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Proactive behaviour in prior research has referred to as a one-dimensional construct. However, in this study, it is best understood as a multi-dimensional construct, which includes self-initiated behaviours, such as taking charge, engaging in voice, initiating innovation, and problem prevention (El Baroudi, Fleisher, Khapova, Jansen, & Richardson, 2017; Parker & Collins, 2010). Taking charge is proactive actions by workers to bring about systemic change in the way work is carried out (Parker & Collins, 2010). Voice addresses issues impacting one's working group and provides knowledge on such issues (Parker & Collins, 2010). Initiating innovation is improving the internal organisation with novel solutions (Parker & Collins, 2010). Problem prevention is self-directed and anticipatory behaviour taken to address recurring challenges and barriers in the workplace (Parker & Collins, 2010). Proactive work behaviour was used for this study because these behaviours are focused on changing the internal organisational climate by enhancing work practises or influencing peers. The employee's proactivity level is influenced by various factors, including individual and situational factors (Bindl & Parker, 2010). Many studies have explored individual factors such as proactive personality, but only a few have investigated proactive work behaviour's socio-demographic variables. (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Ouyang, Lam, & Wang, 2015). Socio-demographic factors are salient for workplace behaviour, but limited studies have studied it under primary objectives instead of using it as a control variable only (Chaudhary & Rangnekar, 2017).

2.1 Gender

Concerning demographic variables and proactive work behaviour, inconsistent results were found (Bindl & Parker, 2010). Many scholars argued that male is more proactive than female as they are generally more proactively participate in job search (Kanfer et al., 2001), networking behaviours (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998), and voice up in the workplace (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). However, type and level of occupation are often confounded with gender and influence the proactivity level (Bindl & Parker, 2010).

2.2 Age

Research findings have not always found consensus about the influence of age on proactive work behaviours. Some studies are demonstrating proactivity has no relationships with age (Warr & Fay, 2001) whereas Jannsen and Van Yperen, (2004) noted that less proactivity for older workers. On the contrary, age was found to have a positive relationship with on-the-job proactivity (van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008).

2.3 Managerial position

An employee with a higher hierarchical position can be assumed to exhibit a higher level of proactivity as their job resources and dedication level have been improved (Dikkers, Jansen, de Lange, Vinkenburger, & Kooij, 2010). Mestdagh, Van Rompaey, Peremans, Meier, and Timmermans (2018) found that employee tends to be passive and dare not propose ideas due to hierarchical status. On the other hands, an employee with a higher hierarchical position has higher job autonomy and have greater latitude in taking the initiative than others (Glaser, 2016).

2.4 Marital status

When exploring the link between marital status and work performance and work effectiveness, the finding is demonstrating a positive association (Selmer, Suutari, & Laurant, 2011). According to Ahituv and Lerman (2007), marriage might affect the work effort for both men and women, in turn, reflect on total hours worked. Shin and Park (2019) nevertheless found that employee marital status is a significant moderating factor in the relationship between workers' perceived materialistic benefits and their commitment to normative change.

2.5 Level of Education

In past studies, individuals' proactive behaviour at work was predicted well with knowledge and abilities (Kanfer et.al, 2001; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Similarly, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) found that education is positively linked to voice behaviour in the workplace. Higher education equips employees with knowledge and mental skills that help to develop proactivity. At the same time, employees' confidence in speaking up and proposing creative solutions is also enhanced. (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998).

2.6 Work Tenure

An employee with longer work tenure can be expected to display a higher level of proactivity as employees' job experience provides better knowledge of the job and the organisation. (Bindl & Parker, 2010). With the profound knowledge about the organisation and its routines, employees can decide when to be proactive (Schmitt, Hartog, & Belschak, 2016; Tornau & Frese, 2013).

3.0 Methodology

This study employs the non-probability sampling, purposive sampling method. Data are purposively collected from a readily available and accessible population who are academicians who work in private universities. In this study, the G-Power 3.0.10 statistical power analysis program is used to calculate the target sample size. Thus, run with an effect size of 0.15 (medium effect), an α of 0.05, and a power of 0.95, 160 participants is generated as the minimum sample size for this study.

A total of the 13-item composite scale, measuring the four dimensions of proactive work behaviours was used in this study because of its emphasis on initiating internal organisational change (Parker & Collins, 2010). The subscales of proactive work behaviours include taking charge (3 items), individual innovation (3 items), problem prevention (3 items), and voice (4 items). The respondents are asked to rate how often they exhibit proactive behaviour in their workplace based on a five-point Likert scale with an anchor from 1= 'Very infrequently/Never' to 5= 'very frequently/ Always'. Sample items from proactive behaviour (Parker & Collins, 2010) includes 'How frequently do you generate creative ideas?' and 'How frequently do you try to find the root cause of things that go wrong?'

All the collected data were analysed using statistical software SPSS 23. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the level of proactiveness of academicians in private universities. To analyse the differences between the overall proactive work behaviour of the academic staff based on their gender, managerial role, marital status, educational level, work tenure, and age, the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA, Post-hoc Tukey tests were executed.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Response rate

As for the 1250 questionnaires distributed to 10 private universities in Malaysia, 302 questionnaires were replied. Out of the 302, only 287 were found usable and 15 were discarded due to incompleteness. Overall, 287 usable questionnaires were collected which yielded the response rate of 22.96%.

4.1.1 Demographic profile

Among the total 287 respondents in the present study, most of them were female (63.1%). This is a common phenomenon in higher education industry wherein the year 2017, 56 per cent of female academicians work in private universities in Malaysia (MOHE, 2017). This is also indicating the domination of female in the education line. In terms of analysis by age, the largest group of respondents was between 31 and 40 years old, with 47.4 per cent. Following the respondents' age 41-50 (31.7%) and age 50 and above (11.5 %). Most of the academicians' Private universities in this study would consider to have their stable career foundation at their age 30s and above. However, it is still having a small number of relatively young (9.4%) from the age group below 30 years old who may just complete their master's degree and be new to academia. Not surprisingly, majority of the respondents are married (73.2%) and only a quarter of them single and others in divorce status. In general, 61 per cent of the respondents were awarded a Master Degree or equivalent. It was also noted that about 32.4 per cent of respondents received their PhD degree while there is still 6.6 per cent of respondents with a Bachelor degree. In terms of organisation tenure, the majority of experienced academicians (45.3 %) are attached to an existing institution for more than 8 years. This is followed by 6.1 to 8 years (18.8%), 2 to 4 years (17.8%), 4.1 to 6 years (12.5%) and less than 2 years (5.6%). The main reason for this may well be the respondents were from reputable Private universities. According to social identity theory, academicians will refrain from a turnover when they strongly identified with their institutions. Throughout the entire research, the respondents were responsive. Almost half of the respondents (49.1%) held a managerial position in their institution such as dean, deputy deans, head of the programme, programme coordinator, programme director, head of the department, etc.

4.1.2 Scale reliability and level of proactive work behaviour

Reliability analysis had been carried out to check the consistency of the variable items. According to Ursachi, Horodnic, and Zait (2015), alpha coefficient (α) of 0.6-0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability, and 0.8 or greater a very good level. As shown in Table 1, the overall alpha coefficient of proactive work behaviour was found to be 0.867 and with an alpha coefficient of the four dimensions ranging from 0.667 – 0.840, well above the threshold of 0.6.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficient and Descriptive analysis of Proactive Work Behaviour

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items	Mean	SD
Proactive Work Behaviour	0.867	13	3.52	0.48
Taking Charge	0.667	3	3.72	0.54
Problem Prevention	0.686	3	3.58	0.57
Individual Innovation	0.756	3	3.52	0.65
Voice	0.840	4	3.25	0.71

As depicted in Table 1, proactive work behaviour recorded a mean value of 3.52 out of 5.0 with a standard deviation of 0.48, indicating that the respondents exhibit moderate proactiveness in their workplace. As can be seen, among the four activities which reflect the proactive work behaviour, voice recorded the lowest mean value of 3.25 whereby taking charge marked the highest mean value of 3.72 out of 5.0. This indicates that employee voice lacks the institution's lack of a proper mechanism to channel their voice or engage in employee silence instead of voice.

Considering gender differences, the results of t-test for proactive work behaviour were shown in Table 2. It was found that mean proactive work behaviour scores for male was higher than female and indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in proactive work behaviour level of men ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.47$) and female ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.47$). The findings were in sync with most of the previous studies (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Kanfer et al., 2001; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) where men are more proactive than women in terms of job search, networking and voice-over issues at the workplace.

Table 2. Independent T-test for Gender and Managerial position holder

Group	n=287	Mean	SD	t	Sig -t (2 tails)
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	106	3.61	0.47	2.603	0.010
Female	181	3.46	0.47		
<i>Managerial Position</i>					
Yes	141	3.58	0.48	-2.134	0.034
No	146	3.46	0.47		

Moreover, t-test result for a managerial position and proactive work behaviour were depicted in Table 2. This revealed that academic staff holding the managerial position ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.48$) are significantly more proactive than those who do not hold any managerial position in faculty and university ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.47$). This is in line with the findings of Dikkers, Jansen, de Lange, Vinkenburg and Kooij (2010) where proactivity of the employee has increased when levels of dedication and job resources have been improved. This could be because those academic staff in a managerial position have higher job autonomy and have greater latitude in taking the initiative than others (Glaser, 2016).

To examine whether age makes a difference in academicians' proactivity level in private universities, respondents were divided into four age groups: 30 and below, between 31-40, between 41-50, and above 51. One-way ANOVA was used for data analysis and the results are summarised in Table 3. As can be seen, there were no significant differences in the level of proactivity of academicians with varying age groups in private universities. Simultaneously, the Tukey test is shown in Table 4 and confirms the lack of any significant differences in the different age groups. The findings contradicted most previous studies where age was significantly related to proactivity level either negatively (Jannsen & Van Yperen, 2004) or positively (van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008). Nevertheless, the finding was consistent with Warr and Fay (2001) results where there were no significant differences in proactivity level in different age groups. This probably suggests that all the academicians of all ages could be equally passionate into their job and take charge to improve teaching and learning effectiveness in the workplace.

Table 3. ANOVA test for Academic Staff's Age

Variable	Age Category	n=287	Mean	SD	F	Sig-F
Proactive Work Behaviour	30 and below	27	3.44	0.35	2.272	0.080
	31-40	136	3.49	0.48		
	41-50	91	3.51	0.48		
	Above 50	33	3.71	0.51		

Table 4. Post-hoc analysis for Academic Staff's Age -Tukey method

Variable	Age Category	Mean Difference	Sig. at $p < 0.05$	
Proactive Work Behaviour	30 and below	31-40	-0.053	0.952
		41-50	-0.067	0.916
		Above 50	-0.274	0.118
	31-40	30 and below	0.053	0.952
		41-50	-0.015	0.996
		Above 50	-0.221	0.078
	41-50	30 and below	0.067	0.916
		31-40	0.015	0.996
		Above 50	-0.206	0.141
	Above 50	30 and below	0.274	0.118
		31-40	0.221	0.078
		41-50	0.206	0.141

In analysing the significant mean difference among the academicians proactivity level based on the marital status, the one-way ANOVA results shown in Table 5 reveal a significant effect of marital status on proactivity level at 0.05 level of significance. Post-hoc Tukey test in Table 6 indicated that the mean proactivity score for married academicians ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.48$) significantly differed from

the single academicians (M=3.39, SD= 0.46). The results are in line with our expectation and previous studies (Ahituv & Lerman, 2007; Selmer, Suutari, & Lauring, 2011) where the married worker may have put in more effort into their work not only for their role in raising family income but also hoping to generate higher pay rate in the future.

Table 5. ANOVA test for Academic Staff's Marital Status

Variable	Marital Status	n=287	Mean	SD	F	Sig-F
Proactive Work Behaviour	Single	70	3.39	0.46	4.009	0.019
	Married	210	3.55	0.48		
	Others	7	3.73	0.43		

Table 6. Post-hoc analysis for Academic Staff's Marital Status – Tukey method

Variable	Marital Status	Mean Difference	Sig. at p<.05	
Proactive Work Behaviour	Single	Married	-0.166*	0.030
		Others	-0.345	0.157
		Others	0.166*	0.030
	Married	Single	-0.178	0.586
		Others	0.345	0.157
		Others	0.178	0.586

To test whether education level plays a role in determining proactivity levels among academicians in a private university, respondents were divided into three categories follow their highest education qualification i.e. bachelor degree, master degree and doctorate (PhD). The one-way ANOVA test findings as depicted in Table 7 revealed a significant difference in mean proactivity score among the academicians based upon different education levels at 0.05 level of significance. Post-hoc Tukey test from Table 8 indicated that the mean score for proactivity level at bachelor degree (M=3.31, SD= 0.36) was significantly different from those PhD holders (M=3.59, SD=0.54). However, the mean proactivity score for master degree holder did not significantly differ from bachelor degree holder and PhD holder. The results are in line with previous studies (Schmitt et al., 2016; Tornau & Frese, 2013). An employee with higher-level education is normally equipped with knowledge and ability (e.g. problem-solving skills), which helps demonstrate change-oriented behaviour and more confidence to voice up (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998).

Table 7. ANOVA test for Academic Staff's Highest Qualification

Variable	Highest Qualification	n=287	Mean	SD	F	Sig-F
Proactive Work Behaviour	Bachelors degree or equivalent	19	3.31	0.36	3.142	0.045
	Masters degree or equivalent	175	3.50	0.44		
	PhD or equivalent	93	3.59	0.54		

Table 8. Post-hoc analysis for Academic Staff's Highest Qualification –Tukey method

Variable	Highest Qualification	Mean Difference	Sig. at p<.05	
Proactive Work Behaviour	Bachelors degree or equivalent	Masters degree or equivalent	-0.185	0.238
		PhD or equivalent	-0.281*	0.049
	Masters degree or equivalent	Bachelors degree or equivalent	0.185	0.238
		PhD or equivalent	-0.096	0.256
	PhD or equivalent	Bachelors degree or equivalent	0.281*	0.049
		Masters degree or equivalent	0.096	0.256

To examine whether work tenure makes a difference in academicians' proactivity level in private universities, respondents were divided into five groups: below 2 years, between 2 -4 years, between 4.1- 6 years, between 6.1 – 8 years and above 8 years. The one-way ANOVA results for work tenure and proactivity level were in detailed in Table 8, which show the insignificant difference between groups at p > 0.05. Furthermore, Tukey's post hoc test also shows the same result where no significant differences were found in academicians' proactivity levels with varying tenure in the university. The result contradicted our expectation and past studies that have reported a positive relationship between work tenure and proactive work behaviour (Schmitt et al., 2016; Tornau & Frese, 2013). However, in Tornau and Frese (2013) 's study, only tenure and voice show small significant relationship but found an insignificant relationship for other proactivity dimensions i.e. taking charge and personal initiative. Therefore, when the academicians under study demonstrated high level in taking charge and low level in voice, work tenure will not differ significantly in their proactivity level. In other

words, the sense of mission as an academician always urge them to make constructive efforts on how work is performed regardless of how long they have been with the university.

Table 9. ANOVA test for Academic Staff's Organisation Tenure

Variable	Work Tenure	n=287	Mean	SD	F	Sig-F
Proactive Work Behaviour	Below 2 years	16	3.44	0.32	1.603	0.174
	2 to 4 years	51	3.57	0.50		
	4.1 to 6 years	36	3.37	0.42		
	6.1 to 8 years	54	3.60	0.45		
	Above 8 years	130	3.51	0.50		

Table 10. Post-hoc analysis for Academic Staff's Organisation Tenure –Tukey method

Variable	Work Tenure		Mean Difference	Sig. at p<.05
Proactive Work Behaviour	Below 2 years	2 to 4 years	-0.128	0.880
		4.1 to 6 years	0.073	0.986
		6.1 to 8 years	-0.163	0.745
		Above 8 years	-0.076	0.975
	2 to 4 years	Below 2 years	0.128	0.880
		4.1 to 6 years	0.201	0.294
		6.1 to 8 years	-0.035	0.996
		Above 8 years	0.052	0.963
	4.1 to 6 years	Below 2 years	-0.073	0.986
		2 to 4 years	-0.201	0.294
		6.1 to 8 years	-0.236	0.142
		Above 8 years	-0.149	0.456
	6.1 to 8 years	Below 2 years	0.163	0.745
		2 to 4 years	0.035	0.996
		4.1 to 6 years	0.236	0.142
		Above 8 years	0.088	0.784
	Above 8 years	Below 2 years	0.076	0.975
		2 to 4 years	-0.052	0.963
		4.1 to 6 years	0.149	0.456
		6.1 to 8 years	-0.088	0.784

At a glance, the study depicts that academicians in private universities demonstrated moderate proactivity level where taking charge was their main role display. Regarding the socio-demographic variables, namely gender, marital status, education level, and managerial position have shown significant differences in proactivity level among academicians, whereby age and work tenure did not differ significantly with proactivity level.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This study's findings provide several useful implications for management on how to improve the proactivity level among academicians in a private university. Different approaches need to adapt while assigning work tasks or initiatives, taking into account gender, marital status, educational differences and managerial position. For instance, management can assign more challenging role to male staff compare to female staff, especially married male staff. They have a higher sense of family obligation and are willing to spend more time in their works to provide financial support for their family (Choong, Keh, Tan, & Tan, 2013). Furthermore, since academician who holds a managerial position in faculty or university tends to be more proactive, succession planning should have in place to ensure capable academicians have the equal opportunity to be appointed for the position. This may promote diversity of thought to drive innovation and creativity in the university. Lastly, management should encourage and support the academicians to further study in doctorate. Higher education level will generate higher abilities that help individuals identify ineffective procedures and anticipate future organisational needs (Tornau & Frese, 2013).

Every study has its limitations. This study's main limitation is the target respondent, which only focuses on academic staff in Malaysian private universities. Thus, the findings did not apply to public universities and colleges due to different work cultures, environments, and policies. Apart from that, only limited demographic factors were investigated in this study. Personal factors such as Big-5 personality and self-efficacy which may have a direct impact on the proactivity level of employee. Further studies may have carried out to include other variables which remained unmeasured.

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