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Fostering Innovative Work Behaviour of Public Sector Employees: A Nominal Group Technique

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Abstract

Innovative work behaviour has received significant attention in research that benefits individuals, groups and organisations. However, factors that affect innovative work behaviour, specifically among public sector employees, are rarely studied. Hence, this paper proposes solutions to increase innovative work behaviour using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The experts provided an overview of 11 potential solutions to enhance the public sector employee's innovative work behaviour. The NGT approach facilitated the quick and readily validation of literature elements that experts subsequently discussed and voted on. This paper references future studies on human resource management and practices.

Keywords: Innovative Work Behaviour: Public Sector; Nominal Group Technique; Human Resource Management

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1.0 Introduction

In a dynamic and competitive global environment, innovation plays an important role. The current domestic and global economic challenges have demanded that all individuals or organisations, whether public or private, formulate competitive advantages and apply innovation to meet customers' needs and expectations. Individuals or organisations that can innovate will have an advantage in acting faster than those who cannot. In facing the unpredictable changes in the business environment, employees' innovative work behaviour is increasingly acknowledged as an enhancement of organisational efficiency and competitiveness. Furthermore, organisations' success largely relies on their employees' capacity to participate in innovative work behaviour (Afsar et al., 2020). Similarly, AlEssa and Durugbo (2022) pointed out that innovative work behaviour enhances employees' capacity to maintain a competitive advantage and stability.

In the Malaysian context, the public sector manages and implements various economic activities that serve society and stakeholders. Therefore, encouraging innovative work behaviour among public sector employees is critical as the public sector has to find solutions to ensure effective service delivery. The public sector in Malaysia often faces constraints in fostering a culture of innovation. Numerous rules and procedures, a high degree of control and minimal flexibility are features of public organisations that may hinder employees' innovative work behaviour. Besides that, personal problems, the difficulty of work-life balance, and managing personal time and space are internal challenges faced by employees in the public sector. On the other hand, external challenges include leadership skills, budget constraints, support systems, and incentive structures, which affect public sector innovation performance. As a result, organisations cannot execute objectively due to issues brought on by lacking innovative work behaviour practices (Alheet et al., 2021). Hence, this

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study aims to identify the experts' consensus on understanding the implications of innovative work behaviour for public sector employees. The objectives are to determine the antecedents and to identify suggestions for encouraging innovative work behaviour based on the participants'/experts' views. This study is critical because it can provide insight into improving innovative work behaviour in the public sector from the individual level, which can create value added to the services provided, increase customer satisfaction, and build an image of the public sector. Policymakers and managers can design more effective strategies to encourage innovation by understanding the factors influencing employees' innovative work behaviour.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Innovative Work Behaviour

The initial concept of innovative work behaviour was made known by Farr and Ford (1990). Later, Scott et al. (1994) stated that innovative work behaviour results from creative activity, producing new ideas. According to Janssen (2000), innovative work behaviour is when employees intentionally generate, introduce, and implement novel ideas within the context of their tasks to enhance performance. Additionally, innovative work behaviour is a behavioural process that contains several sequences of different activities, including the generation, introduction and application of ideas, processes, products and procedures by individuals, groups or beneficial organisations De Spiegelaere, (2014). In summary, innovative behaviour includes the actions of individuals who introduce, develop, and change procedures or work processes to improve and increase organisational efficiency and effectiveness (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Dorenbosch et al., 2005).

The innovation in the organisation is highly dependent on the innovative behaviour of employees or individuals to give the organisation a competitive advantage (Mansoor, Farrukh, et al., 2021). In increasingly challenging situations, employees take on additional responsibilities and play an essential role in achieving the organisation's targeted performance. In this situation, the employees would enhance their contribution beyond their job scope and be able to implement innovation activities continuously. Accordingly, to maintain high innovation among employees, they should be encouraged to practice innovative work behaviour, not just focus on routine work and existing practices (Ven, 1986). Thus, innovative work behaviour is referred to as engaging with aims to boost the workplace's problem-solving efficiency and effectiveness (Xerri & Brunetto, 2013). In other words, innovative work behaviour is the combined efforts of individuals and teams to generate new services, products, tasks, or ideas that improve the organisation's overall innovativeness and produce beneficial results (Farrukh et al., 2022).

2.2 Determinants of Innovative Work Behaviour

There has been a steady rise in publications focusing on innovative work behaviour. Researchers have found innovative work behaviour significantly influences organisational performance, making it a subject of attention (Choi et al., 2021). In order to maintain a consistent stream of individual innovativeness, a firm must ensure that its employees are both eager and able to innovate (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Organisations generally identify factors that can improve organisational innovation to achieve organisational objectives. The literature review of past researchers shows that several factors influence and support innovative work behaviour. Innovative work behaviour factors can be seen at the individual, group and organisational levels or based on dimensions such as personal characteristics and internal structure. Factors that attract past researchers' attention can also be categorised as the environment, individuals, organisations, and leadership (Al-Omari et al., 2019).

Prior research has examined the factors that influence individual innovative work behaviour in response to the growing understanding of the importance of individual innovative work behaviour (Contreras et al., 2020). Similarly, numerous leadership styles have been studied, with innovative work behaviour and transformational leadership being the most popular. Organisational factors such as culture, job demand, and learning organisation are also being tested related to innovative work behaviour. Nevertheless, the discoveries in this particular domain remain restricted and inconclusive. The research on innovative work behaviour still lacks comprehensiveness and is inconsistent about the factors influencing innovative work behaviour (Stankevičiute et al., 2020). The factors that affect innovative work behaviour are difficult to identify (Carlucci et al., 2020) and not cohesive (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). While several research studies have examined the impact on innovative work behaviour, none have comprehensively understood the factors that shape innovative work behaviour. Hence, further investigation of factors that influence innovative work behaviour is required.

2.3 Individual Factors

The question of who is responsible for implementing innovation is often raised. Innovation can occur at various levels, individual, group, or organisation. This view is also supported by King and Anderson (2002), who state that ideas need to be sparked first before innovation occurs in introducing something new to individuals, groups, firms, industries and society. The presence of employees who demonstrate innovative work behaviour in the workplace is crucial in creating a high-performance organisation (Scott et al., 1994). Therefore, several individual components, such as attitudes, instincts, abilities, goals, personality, and cognitive processes, contribute to the self. Some examples of individual aspects studied by previous researchers include psychological empowerment, emotional intelligence, agile learning, work engagement, competency, social capital, readiness to change, role clarity and proactive behaviour.

2.4 Organisational Factors

Organisational factors play a significant role in contributing positive effects to innovative work behaviour. Employees' innovative work behaviour is not only affected by the ability and desire of individuals but is also influenced by various organisational factors. These

factors create an environment that can encourage workplace innovation. Previous researchers have discovered many factors related to employees' innovative work behaviour, such as organisational climate, organisational support, knowledge sharing, job demand, HRM practices and many other characteristics. Therefore, understanding and optimising organisational factors is essential to foster a culture of innovation and increase competitiveness.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Nominal Group Technique

The nominal group technique (NGT) is a systematic and structured data collection and problem-solving method that obtains consensus among group members. Van De & Delbecq, 1971 first introduced this technique, and it is usually used in situations where the involvement and input of various parties are required to make more accurate and effective decisions. NGT involves a number of specific steps that help ensure that each group member has an equal opportunity to contribute ideas without being influenced by a more dominant group member. A structured and organised process helps improve the quality of decisions made, as they are based on diverse and comprehensive inputs that help to reach a consensus in the group more effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, NGT techniques have extended to many fields, such as education, business, health, and social and government organisations.

Basically, two fundamental stages underlie NGT methods: problem identification through discussion and voting to make quick decisions. Moreover, selecting participants must meet several criteria based on the recommendations of Abdullah and Islam (2011); for instance, the participants should possess extensive knowledge of the field studied and various backgrounds. This criteria will enable participants to share views on issues from different angles and also provide different views of ideas. Additionally, Siti Farhah and Saedah (2015) propose that participants who are experts in the field have a minimum of five years of experience. Therefore, the ideas chosen in the final sessions of NGT are of high quality and better than those of other decision-making techniques.

3.2 Sampling

Sample size in the NGT is an important aspect that needs to be considered to ensure the effectiveness and quality of the results produced. NGTs usually involve small groups of 5 to 12 people to ensure optimum interaction, time effectiveness and high decision quality. Previous studies have utilised the following sample size, which has been specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample size of the NGT method of previous researchers

Researcher	Sample Size
Van de Ven and Delbecq (1971)	5 -9 participants
Abdullah & Islam (2011)	7 -10 participants
Harvey & Holmes (2012)	6 - 12 participants
Odu and Okereke (2012)	9 -12 participants
Habibah et al. (2016)	7 -14 participants

(Source: Muqsith Ahmad et al., 2017)

This study employs NGT to identify the critical factors that encourage innovative work behaviour. This technique has recently been utilised in the public sector, which sets this study's approach apart from similar studies. Basically, NGT consists of four steps: (1) participants write down their solutions in a brainstorming session, (2) share and list down the ideas in response to the questions, (3) each element is addressed and improved, and (4) vote and rank the elements. For this study, 11 participants working in the public sector with 15 to 20 years of experience from different backgrounds and expertise participated in the NGT, as suggested by the scholars. This number is appropriate for this research, considering the current situation that makes idea generation, discussion and voting processes more efficient and less time-consuming. With smaller groups, the discussion quality increased because participants could focus and share more. Each idea expressed by the participants is thoroughly analysed and prevented from being disregarded. Before the voting process, the elements and items that are being discussed are categorised, improved and themed. Then, participants were given a range of 1 to 5 points, of which 5 are the most essential voting elements.

4.0 Findings

This section presents the key findings of this study on the individual factors that affect public employees' innovative work behaviour. The analysis reveals significant insights into how various factors influence innovative behaviour within the organisation's workplace by systematically examining the voting results. The results of this study, which reflect the participants'/experts' viewpoints on the individual factors influencing innovative work behaviour, are aligned with the literature review on the determinants of employees' innovative work behaviour, especially the three critical factors, which are psychological empowerment, agile learning and emotional intelligence.

4.1 Analysis

The comprehensive result voted by the participants/experts for individual factors influencing employees' innovative work behaviour is shown in Table 2. This study was analysed using NGT-Plus. The 70% criterion, as stated by Mustapha et al. (2022), determines the acceptability and potential impact of the proposed factors. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that every participant/expert in the study concurs that the suggested factors are suitable and may be effectively adopted and implemented in the organisations. The results

in Table 3 indicate the rank of individual factors influencing innovative work behaviour among public employees. This analysis shows that psychological empowerment ranks first, followed by agile learning in second place, and emotional intelligence in third place. Factors such as perceived role clarity, work engagement, and organisational commitment share the fourth position. Meanwhile, social capital, proactive behaviour, and competency are ranked fifth, while self-efficacy and readiness to change are ranked sixth.

Table 2. NGT voting result

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Items	Voter 1	Voter 2	Voter 3	Voter 4	Voter 5	Voter 6	Voter 7	Voter 8	Voter 9	Voter 10	Voter 11	Total item score	Percent	Rank Priority	Voter Consensus
Psychological Empowerment	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	53	96.36	1	Suitable
Perceived Role Clarity	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	50	90.91	4	Suitable
Social Capital	5	5	5	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	49	89.09	5	Suitable
Emotional Intelligence	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	51	92.73	3	Suitable
Proactive Behaviour	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	49	89.09	5	Suitable
Competency	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	49	89.09	5	Suitable
Self-efficacy	5	5	5	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	48	87.27	6	Suitable
Readiness to Change	4	5	5	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	48	87.27	6	Suitable
Agile Learning	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	52	94.55	2	Suitable
Work Engagement	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	50	90.91	4	Suitable
Organisational Commitment	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	50	90.91	4	Suitable

Table 3. The rank of individual factors on innovative work behaviour

Table 5. The fall of individual factors on innovative work behaviour				
Item	Rank			
Psychological Empowerment	1			
Agile Learning	2			
Emotional Intelligence	3			
Perceived Role Clarity	4			
Work Engagement	4			
Organisational Commitment	4			
Social Capital	5			
Proactive Behaviour	5			
Competency	5			
Self-efficacy	6			
Readiness to Change	6			

5.0 Discussion

During the brainstorming session, participants identified and recommended 11 elements for voting. Psychological empowerment is considered the most critical factor because it involves individuals' feelings of empowerment and control in performing their tasks, which motivates them to take the initiative and try new approaches. This psychological empowerment includes four main dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, all of which contribute significantly to the courage and self-confidence of individuals to innovate. Agile learning, which is second, shows the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in a dynamic work environment. Adaptability and the ability to learn quickly allow public employees to remain relevant and competitive in facing change and new challenges. In third place, emotional intelligence emphasises the importance of emotional management and interpersonal relationships in organisations. The ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own and other people's emotions is essential in creating a harmonious and productive work environment, which allows public employees to communicate effectively, deal with conflicts wisely, and build strong collaborations to implement innovative projects.

These factors share the fourth position, indicating that role clarity, work involvement, and organisational commitment are equally important in promoting innovative work behaviour. Role clarity helps public employees understand their expectations and responsibilities more clearly, while high work engagement shows deep motivation and dedication to their jobs. On the other hand, organisational commitment reflects loyalty and belief in the vision and mission of the organisation, which encourages public employees to work harder to introduce innovation. The fifth position shared by social capital, proactive behaviour, and competency shows the importance of social networks, proactive initiatives, and skills in driving innovation. Social capital involves networks and relationships that can provide the support and resources needed to implement new ideas. Proactive behaviour involves identifying and acting on new opportunities before they are asked for. Competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform tasks effectively and efficiently. Lastly, self-efficacy and readiness to change are ranked sixth. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks, vital for overcoming challenges and exploring new ideas. Readiness to change shows the openness and willingness of individuals to accept and implement change in driving innovation.

Overall, from the findings, this paper has identified the critical factors of employees' innovative work behaviour in the public sector in Malaysia using the NGT approach. The findings are significant because earlier studies have primarily focused on developed countries and the private sector, and there has been little study on the public sector. The results of this study provide a deep insight into the individual factors that are important in promoting innovative work behaviour among public employees in Malaysia. For instance, public sector employees not only do their routine tasks but also find new ways and provide innovative ideas to solve problems. The public sector organisations face challenges of deficit pressures, increased cost of living, and rapid technological changes that require public employees to be more responsive, flexible and resilient to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. By understanding high-rank critical factors, such as psychological empowerment, agile learning, and emotional intelligence, policymakers and human resource managers can design more effective strategies to increase innovation in public organisations.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, innovative work behaviour among public employees is vital for organisations' growth and success in today's dynamic environment. Organisations prioritising and fostering a culture of innovation are more likely to remain viable, effective, and competitive. This research has emphasised the importance of understanding innovation from a behavioural perspective and the need to harness the innovative work behaviour of individual employees for organisational-level outcomes. By recognising the factors of innovative work behaviour, assessing its impact, and implementing strategies to foster creativity and innovation, organisations can create an environment that encourages employees to be innovative and develop innovative solutions continually.

The research findings highlight the importance of innovative work behaviour in driving organisational success. The findings and ideas from the experts can be leveraged to create a framework to enhance innovative work behaviour, which could be used as a guideline for future policy programs. This research has revealed that psychological empowerment plays a crucial role in influencing employee innovative behaviour. The human resources management practices could be designed based on combinations of elements, such as agile learning, emotional intelligence, role clarity and other elements, to encourage innovative work behaviour among employees at all levels of the organisation.

Despite the significant findings, this study has limitations as the public sector involves diverse stakeholders. Enhancing the participation of various experts from different fields would yield valuable insight into the study. On top of that, future research could continue exploring other related factors (organisational, leadership and environment) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of innovative work behaviour in the public sector in Malaysia.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper offers valuable insights into filling the knowledge gap and understanding the importance of individual factors that support innovative work behaviour of public sector employees. This study also provides a comprehensive analysis by identifying and ranking the critical factors that affect innovative work behaviour, which correspond with the objectives, initiatives and strategies outlined in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, 2021-2025 and the agenda of Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Encouragement of innovative work behaviour among employees should be given serious attention as it can enhance practical applications of innovation in public organisations.

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