



## The influence of quality of work life (QWL) and organizational commitment on job performance among academics in the Malaysian public universities

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### Abstract

In Malaysian, the education sector has become very significant in transforming Malaysia into a high-income country. Therefore, the emphasis on the higher institutions has increased while the jobs of academics have become increasingly demanding and challenging. The jobs of Malaysian academics are increasingly challenging because of the requirement of attaining the key performance indicators (KPI) and the constant demands from universities and from stakeholders to produce excellent and employable graduates in the country. Because of the aforementioned challenges in today's workplace, high commitment is required from the public universities academics. Thus, it is important for employers to understand the quality of work life (QWL) of their employees if they are concerned about improving the employees' organizational commitment and job performance. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to close the gap that presently exists in the quality of work life (QWL) study by determining the factors that improve or impede the relationship between QWL and job performance (JP) with the mediating effect of organizational commitment (OC) among academics in the Malaysian public universities.

**Keywords:** Quality of work life, Organizational commitment, Job performance, Academics, Malaysia

### 1. Introduction

Some of the objectives of academics are the right to make decisions concerning curriculum and research agenda, liberty to pursue excellence, ensure an adequate work-life balance, as well as their occupational, professional, and personal growth (Nadarajah *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[40]</sup>. The education sector is considered very significant in most nations of the world (Asrah, Djauhari & Suleiman, 2014) <sup>[9]</sup>. The Malaysian education sector has become very noteworthy in transforming it into a high-income country (Asrah, Djauhari & Suleiman, 2014; Daud, 2012) <sup>[9, 16]</sup>. Therefore, the emphasis on the higher institutions has increased while the jobs of academics have become increasingly demanding and challenging. According to Azman *et al.* (2014) <sup>[11]</sup>, Malaysian academics on average devote 7.98 hours to research activities and 18.19 hours to teaching when lessons are going on. While on the period when lessons are not going on, the academics spend 13.46 hours on research activities and 8.61 hours on teaching. These numbers show that academics are always busy with teaching tasks and research activities even when their students are on holiday.

The success of the education sector depends on the involvement, effort, and contributions of the academic staff and its professional capability. The jobs of Malaysian academics have become increasingly challenging because of the requirement of attaining the key performance indicators (KPI) and the constant demands from universities and from stakeholders to produce excellent and employable graduates in the country (Darus & Ahmad, 2016). These challenges in today's workplace require high commitment from the public

universities staff. Thus, it is important for employers to understand the quality of work life (QWL) of their employees if they are concerned about improving the employees' organizational commitment and job performance. Improved quality of work life of the workers is closely related to the job performance of the workforce and the overall profitability and productivity of the organization (Jerome, 2013; Muindi & K'Obonyo, 2015) <sup>[28, 29]</sup>. In the situation of Malaysian public universities, job performance reveals the quality works the academics produce.

According to Lim *et al.* (2016) <sup>[32]</sup>, the Malaysian government has increased its spending on higher education steadily in recent years. This rapid upsurge of government spending in higher education is shown from RM12.71 billion in 2012 to RM15.05 billion in 2014 (Malaymail, 2017) <sup>[33]</sup>. Accordingly, the higher education ministry expenditure for 2018 was estimated at a total of about RM13.9 billion to take care of both development and operating expenditure. A total of RM12.13 billion for 2017, RM13.3 billion for 2016, and RM14.81 billion for 2015 was allocated to the higher education ministry (Malaymail, 2017) <sup>[33]</sup>. In the 2017 World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report, with regards to the funds given to higher education (evaluated by the spending of higher education), the position of Malaysia was at an exciting spot of top 15<sup>th</sup>. Thus, counting from the substantial amount of funds that Malaysia has devoted to its higher education sector, is it imperative to question how the Malaysian public universities progressed in output

performance. In the 2017 Universitas 21 Ranking, Malaysia attained the 25<sup>th</sup> position in the output grading (evaluated by research productivity and impact, the standard of research, student employability, and other output connected measures) which is lower than the position attained for resources assigned (top 15<sup>th</sup>). Likewise, in The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2017–2018, the highest position attained by the Malaysian public universities (Universiti Malaya) was at a 46<sup>th</sup> position which is a vast improvement from 2015 to 2016 ranking when Universiti Teknologi Malaysia only fell in the 401<sup>st</sup> to the 500<sup>th</sup> group. However, Malaysian public universities are expected to perform even better considering the position gained by the Malaysian government in its expenditure on higher education. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the academics job-related welfare and the degree to which work involvements are satisfying, pleasant and free from strain for better performance.

There are limited research works on the quality of work life (QWL) in Malaysia particularly in the Malaysian public higher education sector (Khairunneezam, Suriani & Nadirah, 2017) [31]. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to close this gap that presently exists in the quality of work life (QWL) study by determining the factors that improve or impede the correlation between QWL and job performance (JP) with the mediating effect of organizational commitment (OC). Most previous studies on organizational commitment focused more on affective commitment (Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Tek, 2010; Yusoff *et al.*, 2015) [29, 53, 58], however, this study will consider the three forms of organizational commitment such as affective, continuance and normative commitment to better understand their mediating effects on the correlation between quality of work life and job performance among academics in the Malaysian public universities. Accordingly, the present study makes an effort to provide answers for the subsequent research questions:

1. To what extent does every quality of work life (QWL) dimension influence organizational commitment among academics in the Malaysian public universities?
2. To what extent does every quality of work life (QWL) dimension influence job performance among academics in the Malaysian public universities?
3. To what extent does employee commitment mediate the relationship between QWL and job performance?

## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1 Job performance

Job performance involves the recognizable actions that individuals perform in their works that are pertinent to the objectives of the organization (Diaz-Vilela *et al.*, 2015) [19]. Therefore, job performance is those actions that are useful in achieving organizational objectives, are within what a person can manage, and can be identified and assessed. Job performance is defined as the sum of the anticipated value to the organization of the different sets of behaviors carried out by an individual over a given period (Motowidlo & Kell, 2012) [37]. The fact that performance is a property of behavior is a vital impression in its explanation. Specifically, it is a combined property of various, distinct behaviors that happen within a certain period. Organizational performance is an indication of the capability of an organization to resourcefully attain different objectives (Muda, Rafiki & Harahap, 2014) [38]. According to Wang (2010) [55], academics' performance is

the main consideration for several universities in performance assessment. Higher education places a higher emphasis on academic assessments as compared to financial assessments (Masron, Ahmad & Rahim, 2012) [34]. The job description of university academics is traditionally characterized by three major components: teaching, research, and service (Tinuke, 2015) [54]. The job description of university academics has been expanded to include teaching and supervision, research and innovation, writing and publication, consultancy, and services (Ishak, Suhaida & Yuzainee, 2009) [27].

### 2.2 Quality of work life (QWL)

Quality of work life (QWL) has become a significant topic recently (Narehan *et al.*, 2014; Zare & Janani, 2015) [42, 59]. QWL is defined as the value of human involvement as they relate in the employee-employer relationship (Noor & Abdullah, 2012) [46]. Thus, there is a need for management to give great importance to the requirements of the utmost significant factor of their organization, specifically, human capitals, if they want to continue and withstand the present-day competitive market. QWL is a broad concept that comprises of a person's job-related welfare and the degree to which job involvements are satisfying, encouraging, and free of stress and other undesirable individual concerns (Bora, 2017; Devi & Ganapathi, 2014) [13, 18]. QWL components comprise of looking into the factors that are connected to work environment such as health and safety of workers, decreasing job stress, and opportunity for advancement (Zare & Janani, 2015) [59]. Nayak, Sahoo and Mohanty (2018) [45] in their study confirmed four components of perceived QWL, comprising of empowerment, communication, teamwork, and work-life balance. Hanefah *et al.* (2003) [26] identified seven measures of QWL such as physical work environment, participation, supervision, growth, and development, fair compensation and benefits, workplace integration, and social relevance.

### 2.3 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment explains how a worker is dedicated and willing to help the employer attain its objectives (Akila & Priyadarshini, 2018; Qazi & Nazneen, 2016). Matata, Elegwa and Maurice (2014) [3, 51, 35] indicated that organizational commitment is a variable that connects employees to the organization. In previous studies, the organizational commitment had a positive relationship with various forms of required job effects, for example, job satisfaction, employees' motivation, and job performance (Ping *et al.*, 2017; Yahaya *et al.*, 2014; Yousef, 2016) [50, 56, 57]. Meyer and Allen (1984) [36] in their early definition, defined organizational commitment as a concept with two dimensions, comprising of continuance commitment and affective commitment. The continuance commitment is the employees' evaluation of the losses involved for leaving employment and making a decision to remain in the same job, on the other hand, affective commitment is how the employees' form a sense of attachment with the organization they work with (Meyer & Allen, 1984) [36]. Allen and Meyer (1990) [57] later expanded their model to include the third form of organizational commitment which is normative commitment. Normative commitment is the employees' feeling of responsibility to remain with the same employer. This form of commitment necessitates the employees to attribute their continued stay in the

organization as their obligation.

#### 2.4 Quality of work life (QWL) and Organizational Commitment (OC)

QWL is a construct of several dimensions that explain the social, mental, physical, and environmental scopes of an employee (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015) <sup>[44]</sup>. It is the outcome of an analysis that each carries out by likening his needs, expectations, and opportunities with what he identifies as certainty (Argentero, Miglioretti & Angilletta, 2007) <sup>[8]</sup>. Kermansaravi *et al.* (2014) <sup>[30]</sup> stated that the quality of work life, which arises as an outcome of reacting to several desires of employees, is one of the significant predictors of organizational commitment. The relationship between QWL and employee commitment is based on the social exchange theory, which proposes that a person receiving a benefit is bonded by a strong normative obligation to return the benefit in some way (Ojedokun *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[47]</sup>. Almarshad (2015) <sup>[6]</sup> concluded that a positive working environment could encourage satisfaction, fair compensations, job security, and career growth opportunities and thus positively influence the level of significance an employee gives the job in his life, as well as the psychological attachment an employee has with his work. Daud (2010) <sup>[15]</sup> found a positive correlation between QWL factors for example growth and development, supervision, contribution, compensation and benefits, and social integration with commitment.

Additionally, Nayak, Sahoo and Mohanty (2018) <sup>[45]</sup> study found a significant correlation between quality of work life and organizational commitment. Thus, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Quality of work life (QWL) has a significant effect on organizational commitment

#### 2.5 Quality of work life (QWL) and Job Performance

Good quality of work life (QWL) is important to enhance working situations (employee perspective) and better organizational efficiency and performance (organizational perspective) (Patil & Swadi, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[49, 50]</sup>. In organizations, QWL is essential for the efficient and smooth running of organizations, because with having good QWL, commitment and loyalty of employees are created, and their optimum potential can be utilized (Beelor, Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2017) <sup>[12]</sup>. A study by Al-Shawabkeh and Hijjawi (2018) <sup>[7]</sup> established that there was a significant influence of quality of work life (QWL) on organizational performance in the private Jordanian universities. Organizations providing the required quality of work life for its workers can accomplish increased human resource efficiency and performance (Gayathiri & Ramakrishnan, 2013) <sup>[24]</sup>. A study by Acheampong, Muhammed and Agyapong (2016) <sup>[1]</sup> established a positive correlation between QWL and job performance. The organizations which favor employees' QWL attract high performing workers as they feel secure and privileged, and ultimately provide better job performance (Akram *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>. Workers who are pleased with the working situation are both devoted to the organization and can

provide excellent services (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015) <sup>[44]</sup>. Quality of work life (QWL) integrates a collection of viewpoints that not only comprise of work-related factors such as job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay and association with work colleagues but also factors that largely mirrors life condition and overall sense of comfort (Nair, 2013) <sup>[41]</sup>. Thus, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** Quality of work life (QWL) has a significant effect on job performance

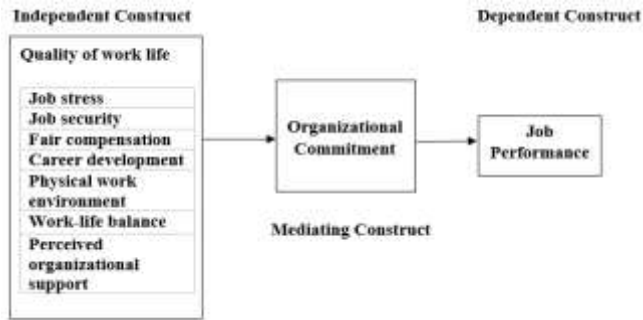
#### 2.6 Organizational Commitment (OC) as a Mediator

Employees frequently assess how their efforts are appreciated by the organizations they work for. A positive assessment can enhance motivation, encourage good conduct at the workplace and assure the employees' perpetuity in the organization without considering the situations (Parvar, Allameh & Ansari, 2013) <sup>[48]</sup>. Workers who are devoted are more flexible, hardworking, have a sense of obligation and are not financial burdens to the organization (Demir, 2012) <sup>[17]</sup>. Several works of literature show a significant correlation between quality of work life (QWL) and employee commitment (OC) (Afşar, 2014; Diraviam, 2016; Farid *et al.*, 2015; Farjad & Varnous, 2013) <sup>[2, 20, 23, 22]</sup>. A study conducted by Zefeiti, and Mohamad (2017) <sup>[60]</sup> found that OC has an important influence on performance. Hafiz (2017) <sup>[25]</sup> in his study found that affective, normative, and continual commitment are positively related to employee's performance separately and jointly. Previous studies on workplace variables and performance relationship have shown that commitment has an important mediating effect in this relationship (Acheampong, Muhammed & Agyapong, 2016; Awan *et al.*, 2014; Nayak & Sahoo, 2015) <sup>[1, 10, 18]</sup>. Awan *et al.* (2014) <sup>[10]</sup> found that organizational commitment partially mediated the correlation between organizational politics and employee job involvement and performance as well. Consistent with the study of Acheampong, Muhammed and Agyapong (2016) <sup>[1]</sup>, who found that organizational commitment partially mediated the association between quality of work life (QWL) and job performance. The study of Nayak and Sahoo (2015) <sup>[44]</sup> also showed that organizational commitment has a partial and significant mediating effect on the correlation between QWL and job performance. The objective of this study is to create a relationship between the three variables by determining the mediating effect of OC. Thus, the below hypothesis is proposed:

**H3:** Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between quality of work life (QWL) and job performance

#### 2.7 The Conceptual Framework

The framework studies the relationships between the quality of work life and job performance with the mediating effect of organizational commitment. From the journals and theories reviewed, researchers recognized that the seven variables stated below are very important in predicting academics' job performance and organizational commitment as a good mediator. So this framework is constructed as below.



**Fig 1:** A Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship between the Quality of work life and Job Performance with the Mediating Effect of Organizational Commitment.

### 3. Methodology

This study undertakes a quantitative approach towards descriptive correlational research approach to explaining the direction and strength of the relationship between the chosen independent variables and academics' job performance. Also, the explanatory research design will be needed to test the relationship and effect of independent variables on the dependent variable in this study. The target population of this study will be the academics (senior lecturers, associate professors, and professors) in the five Malaysian research universities (RU). A stratified random sampling technique will be used to determine the samples representing certain subgroups of academic ranking in the RUs. A sample size of 153 was obtained using G\*Power analysis (Erdfelder *et al.*, 1996) [21] to represent the targeted study participants. A self-administered questionnaire will be used as the research instrument in this study. Questionnaire from several journals will be adapted and modified to ensure that the items suit the current study. To test the proposed model, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis will be employed to examine the hypotheses and establish the validity and reliability of the measurements.

### 4. Conclusion

As earlier mentioned, the purpose of this research is to close this gap that presently exists in quality of work life (QWL) study by determining the factors that improve or impede the correlation between QWL and job performance (JP) with the mediating effect of organizational commitment (OC) among academics in the Malaysian public universities. By providing empirical evidence on these relationships, this study is expected to contribute in enhancing the understanding of the quality of work life (QWL) and its relationship with organization commitment (OC) which will provide benefit to the institution of higher learning (IHL) and the Ministry of Education on improving the working conditions of the academics and lead to academic system transformation. Also, by using this knowledge, it would increase the level of commitment among academics and motivate these academics to produce many high impact research papers and the IHL will continue to produce excellent graduates at the same time. This research will also contribute to the knowledge base in the aspect of quality of work life (QWL) perceptions among academics. QWL is less studied in Asia as compared to North America and European countries (Noor & Adullah, 2012; Narehan *et al.*, 2014). There are still insufficient empirical studies supporting the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between QWL and academics' job performance. Therefore,

this study is predicted to contribute to filling the research gap on the mediating role of organizational commitment towards the academics job performance in the Malaysian public universities.

### 5. Research limitations and directions for further studies

This study should be regarded as an initial exploration, and further extensive empirical research work is required to validate the causal relationships between the quality of work life, organizational commitment, and job performance. Since this study proposed a correlational approach, there can be differing results in the relationships between the independent variables and dependent variable when different respondents are employed. The findings of this study will be limited to the samples of academics in the five Malaysian research universities only. Accordingly, future studies on academics should be conducted involving other public non-research universities.

Furthermore, the present study will involve a highly educated sample (senior lecturers to professors who have achieved masters and Ph.D. level of education). It is also suggested that future research should assess whether the present findings can be used for people with a lower education level. Because of the constraints of resources and time, only seven independent variables were proposed in the study. It is recommended that future research could incorporate other variables in the exploration of academics job performance such as social support, felt obligation, social relevance and other related dimensions. Furthermore, future studies should also consider any possible role of other mediating and moderating constructs such as personality traits, leadership styles, role ambiguity, social support, perceived organizational support and other related factors to provide new perspectives and to contribute to the body of knowledge in the job performance study.

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