

**THE INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING  
ON PROACTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR AMONG  
ACADEMICIANS IN PRIVATE HIGHER  
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: WORK  
ENGAGEMENT AS A MEDIATOR**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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by

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BBT	Broaden and Build Theory
CMV	Common Method Vector
CR	Composite Reliability
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DOSM	Department of Statistic Malaysia
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
IPMA	Importance-Performance Map Analysis
JPT	Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
PLS	Partial Least Square
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SETARA	Sistem Penarafan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia
SSM	Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia

**PENGARUH PENJENAMAAN MAJIKAN ATAS TINGKAH LAKU KERJA  
PROAKTIF DI KALANGAN AHLI AKADEMIK DI INSTITUSI  
PENDIDIKAN TINGGI SWASTA: PENGLIBATAN KERJA SEBAGAI  
PENGANTARA**

**ABSTRAK**

Perubahan berterusan yang berlaku dalam dunia perniagaan telah memberi kesan terhadap domain akademik. Semenjak dua dekad yang lalu, istilah “tingkah laku proaktif” telah mendapat perhatian para cendekiawan berikutan kesan positifnya terhadap pekerjaan. Walaubagaimanapun, konsep ini masih belum diteroka oleh komuniti akademik sekaligus menunjukkan keperluan kajian seminal secara terperinci dilakukan bagi mengesahkan tingkah laku proaktif dalam konteks akademik. Dengan keyakinan bahawa penjenamaan universiti terletak di bawah tanggungjawab pihak pentadbiran, universiti bukan sahaja dijangka menarik minat pelajar bahkan pelbagai bakat bagi memastikan peningkatan prestasi. Jenama majikan menunjukkan nilai saranan unik yang boleh dicapai melalui keterlibatan kerja dengan pihak majikan. Saranan ini sekiranya dilaksanakan sebagaimana dijanjikan akan menyumbang secara positif terhadap reputasi majikan. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini menilai hubungan tidak langsung antara ciri-ciri penjenamaan majikan terhadap tingkah laku proaktif melalui keterlibatan kerja dalam konteks akademik. Selaras dengan objektif kajian, 13 hipotesis dicadangkan berdasarkan kepada dua teori iaitu teori *Social Exchange* (SET) dan teori *Broaden and Build* (BBT). Kaedah kaji rentas keratan telah digunakan dalam kajian ini yang melibatkan 287 ahli akademik daripada 10 institusi pendidikan tinggi swasta (PHEIs). Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan *Modeling Equation Partial Least Square* (PLS-SEM). Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat empat ciri

penjenamaan majikan yang mempengaruhi penglibatan kerja secara positif iaitu nilai sosial, pembangunan, aplikasi dan reputasi. Penglibatan kerja muncul sebagai peramal yang kuat untuk tingkah laku kerja proaktif dalam kalangan ahli akademik di PHEI yang terpilih. Di samping itu, keterlibatan kerja merupakan perantara bagi hubungan nilai sosial, perkembangan dan aplikasi dengan tingkah laku kerja proaktif. Beberapa implikasi teoretikal dan praktikal telah digariskan berdasarkan dapatan kajian.



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**ABSTRACT**

The constant shift experienced in the business realm has always affected the academic domain. In order to stay competitive, being proactive is in essence. The term ‘proactive behaviour’ has garnered much attention from scholars since the past two decades due to its significantly positive effect on work. In light of the academic community, this very concept, nonetheless, has remained untapped; thus the pressing need for rigorous seminal studies to validate proactive behaviour in this academic context. In line with the strong belief in fabulous brand held by the management, universities are expected to attract not only students, but also multiple talents to enhance their performances. Employer brand represents a unique value proposition that one may gain due to engagement in work for the employer. This proposition, if delivered as promised, contributes to positive reputation of the firm as a workplace. Hence, this study examined the indirect relationships between employer brand attributes and proactive work behaviour through work engagement within the academic context. In accordance to the study purpose and objectives, 13 hypotheses were proposed based on two theories; social exchange theory (SET) and broaden and build theory (BBT). The cross-sectional survey method was employed in this study by involving 287 academicians from 10 private higher education institutions (PHEIs). The gathered data were analysed using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that four employer branding attributes positively influenced work engagement, namely social, developmental, application,

and reputation values. Work engagement appeared as a strong predictor to proactive work behaviour among academicians in the selected PHEIs. Additionally, work engagement mediated the correlations of social, developmental, and application values with proactive work behaviour. Based on the outcomes, several theoretical and practical implications are outlined.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the study context, its research issues, the research questions and objectives, the definition of key terms, the significance of this study, and the organisation of this thesis.

#### **1.2 Background of Study**

Organisations have witnessed turbulent environment, technology advancement, stiff competition in the global arena, tight race on consumer preference, and unpredictable changes in external environment since the past century. Organisation, being a key player in the industry, must not only respond actively to the changes that occur, but should be more proactive in managing the changes. Similarly, facing new challenges is not new within the education sector as a result of technological changes in teaching and learning, globalisation of higher education, and changes in economic climate.

##### **1.2.1 The education sector in Malaysia**

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela, 2003). Since the dawn of time, education has always been an important driver for any country to grow economically and socially. Education has a vital function in the progress of a country. In fact, no nation has ever achieved rapid and sustained economic growth without at least a 50% literacy rate (UNESCO, 2016). Investing in education has a profound effect; education results in income growth,

health advancement, promotion of gender equality, climate change mitigation, and eradication of poverty. Education is the wand that can change this world into a better place to live. Education, being the root of achievement for many developing and developed countries, generates a skilled and intelligent generation that paves the destiny of the country.

Malaysia, a developing country located in the Asia Pacific region, is renowned for its superior education system. Children in this country enjoy free primary and secondary education (Bernama, 2018, January 2). The initial six years of primary education is mandatory. Education in Malaysia is aimed at providing students with holistic and integrated opportunities for growth and development, as well as the opportunity to become skilled professionals. The UNESCO (2019) reported that Malaysia achieved a literacy rate of 93.73% in the year 2016, which highlights the noteworthy investment in educational institutions. Tied closely to this notion, a study found that the expenditure spent on education by the government was positively linked with progressive economic growth (Mallick, Das, & Pradhan, 2016).

Based on Table 1.1, the percentage of expenditure for the education sector against the total government expenditure increased from 19.45% in 2013 to 21.06% in 2017. This trend is in line with the spending on education considered adequate by the World Bank (World Education News & Reviews [WENR], 2014). The expenditure on basic education in Malaysia was double than that of other ASEAN countries (WENR, 2014).

Table 1.1 Percentage of Government expenditure on Education

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Government expenditure on education</b>					
as % of total government expenditure	19.45	19.80	19.81	20.70	21.06

Source: UNESCO (2019)

Malaysia's education sector is the backbone in this country due to its significant impact on the other sectors. Education is a pillar that cannot be substituted in nation-building. Human capital development, as a national strategic thrust, aims to attract and retain skilled talents. Nonetheless, skill mismatch was identified as the primary factor that led to the high unemployment rate (35.4%) among graduates in 2018 (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2019a). Therefore, improving the quality of higher education is critical to produce graduates equipped with skillset sought by the industry, to avoid unfruitful skill mismatch.

### 1.2.2 Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs) are classified into two categories; public and private (Ministry of Higher Education [MOHE], 2019a). The total funding for all public HEIs is provided by the government through budget allocations, as well as lump-sum financing for development and capital expenditure. Public HEIs are partially subsidised by the government, while private HEIs (PHEIs) are typically owned by private organisations and most of them are indeed profit-oriented. The mission of both HEIs is, however, similar; to generate a pool of well-educated and skilled professionals that are beneficial to the nation (Ministry of Higher Education [MOHE], 2019a).

The first public HEI, Universiti Malaya, was established in 1961, followed by Universiti Sains Malaysia (1969), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (1970), Universiti Putra Malaysia (1971), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (1975), and in year 2006, Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia. Until 2016, a total of 20 public HEIs have been established across Malaysia, comprising of four comprehensive universities (Universiti Teknologi MARA, Univesiti Islamic Antrabangsa Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak), five research universities (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Univerisiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Univerisiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Universiti of Malaya), and eleven focused universities (Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, and Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia). Comprehensive universities offer courses in various fields of studies for all levels of education, including foundation, undergraduate, and postgraduate degrees, whereas research universities place emphasis on research activities and research-based teaching, and focused universities concentrate on specific fields, such as technical, education, management, and defence.

Given the limited number of public HEIs established across Malaysia, PHEIs have begun emerging to cater to the need of students seeking tertiary education. As such, the first private university, the MultiMedia University (MMU), was established in 1996. Comparatively, only 20 public HEIs were established after 52 years, whereas the total of PHEIs was 446 as on 31st October 2019 (Higher Education Department [JPT], 2019).

As stipulated in the 11th Malaysia Plan (National Institute of Public Administration [INTAN], 2016), private higher education was one of the identifiable sectors in the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) to position Malaysia as a well-known education hub, as well as to generate highly-skilled workforce. The PHEIs grew 7.3% annually from 2011 to 2014 and contributed RM34.3 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 (Economic Planning Unit [EPU], 2016). Between 2015 and 2017, the gross output value of education services increased 7.7% per annum, and based on the 2018 Annual Economic Survey, both college and university education contributed the highest gross production value of RM10.4 billion (59.0%) (DOSM, 2019b). Table 1.2 presents the number of PHEIs in Malaysia that were still active and registered with MOHE as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019.

Table 1.2 Private Higher Education Institutions as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019

STATUS of PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (PHEIs)	TOTAL NUMBER OF PHEIs	Total Enrolment of the International student in 2018
	ACTIVE STATUS AS AT 31 October 2019	
UNIVERSITY	54	48,445
COLLEGE UNIVESITY	37	4,513
INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUS	10	7,377
COLLEGE	345	31,372
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>91,707</b>

Source: MOHE (2019)

In recent years, Malaysia has been back on track towards becoming an international education hub. Malaysia, being the 10th largest provider of education services in the world, has welcomed more than 100,000 international students from over 100 countries. Based on MOHE data in 2018, the population of international students in Malaysia had grown by an average of 16% at an annual basis, thus reaching more than 119,473 international students. If such encouraging growth persists,

Malaysia is set to reach its goal of 250,000 international students by 2025 (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). As the growth of public HEI has been expected to be limited, this goal will require the PHEIs sector to flourish aggressively. In line with this, new education policy, such as the initiation of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996, and active support from the government have further led to the mushrooming of PHEIs. The rapid expansion of PHEIs has resulted in a massive increment in the number of international students intake since the past few years with students enrolling in private to public HEIs at a ratio of 7:3 (MOHE, 2018). As a matter of fact, with approximately 70% of international students having been enrolled in PHEIs, these flourishing PHEIs have been expected to house 175,000 international students in 2025.

To achieve the goal set for international student enrolment, Malaysia must remain competitive in the market. This is because; similar initiatives have been noted in our neighbouring countries, namely Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and other regions of developed nations, towards increasing intake of international students (MOHE,2017). Hence, it is time for PHEIs to strengthen their value proposition, capacity, and capabilities to compete within the region. Apart from the competition at the global arena, liberalisation of higher education, particularly amidst PHEIs, has made competition between local universities and colleges rather tough as well. The PHEIs seem to face the dilemma of securing excellent students as most of the top 10,000 students in Malaysia are selected to enrol in universities abroad through government scholarship or in public HEIs, mainly due to cost factor (Yaakob, Tarmizi, Yunus, Ghani, & Mokhtar, 2009). The impact of Ringgit depreciation began in the second half of 2014 when the global oil prices began to slump, thus deterring some parents from sending their children to study abroad. Hence, Malaysian PHEIs became



their alternative for their children to pursue further studies. This increasing competitive trend in the education sector has compelled PHEIs to relook into improving their services and quality to gain more competitive advantage.

In coping with several challenges, PHEIs have begun placing focus on their main clients. According to Pereira and Da Silva (2003), university clients are classified into primary, secondary, and tertiary groups; primary clients are students, secondary clients are educational institutions and employers, whereas tertiary clients are validators, ex-students, families, and employers. Thus, what is the main factor that influences students to pursue their studies in PHEIs? Yusof, Ahmad, Tajudin, and Ravindran (2008) found that Malaysian students expected quality in education, not quantity. The perceived quality of education stems from the academic reputation of the university in terms of its academic excellence, as well as the quality of its faculty and lecturers.

Quality education can only be achieved with excellent teachers. A major indicator of a quality HEI is the qualification of its academic staff and research capability. Hence, academic staff have a vital role in maintaining the quality of education as they are the backbone of success in HEIs.

### **1.2.3 Academician in PHEIs**

Since the past two decades, the tremendous growth in the Malaysian higher education sector has helped place Malaysia in the global higher education domain to cater to the escalating number of Malaysian and international students. The MOHE has outlined several priorities to be implemented in its Malaysia Education Blueprint (2015-2025) for the next decade to secure a better future for Malaysia in this globalised

and ever-changing world. One strategic objective refers to the focus on outcomes over inputs, as well as to actively pursue academic technologies and innovations in satisfying the needs of students and making the learning experience more personal. The primary player in this context is the academician, who is responsible for producing future human capital as demanded by the nation. Academic staff members are committed to improve their teaching methods, as well as to strengthen their research and innovation capabilities, to make Malaysia the leading education hub (Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014). Parallel to the growth of PHEIs since the past decade, increasing demand of academicians across PHEIs has been noted as their total number has doubled from 24,476 in 2013 to 48,643 academicians in 2017 (MOHE, 2017).

The three main functions of Malaysian academics are teaching, conducting research activities, and performing administration tasks. These three academic roles are equally essential for both public and private HEIs (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2009). The PHEIs would need to seek their own financial assistance and operate on their own with limited resources in a highly competitive environment (Kaur, Shukran, Koo et al., 2014). This need for greater accountability and change has generated a set of Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for universities, thus creating new challenges for the academics (Henny, Anita, Hayati, & Rampal, 2014). In particular, higher expectations of research output and increased administrative tasks have turned into hurdles amongst academic staff in PHEIs. Participation in research activities, as indicated by Sanmugam and Rajanthran (2014), is a demanding task that demands both individual and organisational management efforts. Failure to manage workload exerts a bad impact on both work quality and productivity, which in turn, may affect the academician's physical and mental health (Markom et al., 2012). Academicians must be involved in research activities to be equipped with the advancement of knowledge

and professional growth, but not merely for promotional purposes alone. As Yu (2006) pointed out, academics need to play a proactive role and make full use of the available support towards developing their desirable research arrangements.

Along with the emergence of Higher Education 4.0, one of the critical roles of PHEIs is to ‘realise the vision towards academic excellence, as well as professional and technical enhancement whilst meeting the needs of manpower’ (Higher Education Department [JPT], 2018). Under the Department of Higher Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022, PHEIs have been expected to deliver their best in promoting lifelong learning as PHEIs are indeed suitable for the dissemination of skills and knowledge amidst working adults (Higher Education Department, 2018).

Recently COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted the education sector in Malaysia, academicians in PHEIs not only face additional pressure to manage the disruptions, some of the contractual staff even risk unemployment (Yee, 2020). Academic staff will need to learn how to be comfortable with teaching online and how to deal with the technical challenges of online classrooms. Academic staff not only practise online teaching, likely tweaking lectures, handling student inquiries and complaints, as well as marking reports, they also need to be more responsive to student queries. In addition to learning how to do online teaching, this will mean a more proactive approach to responding to emails from students as compared to before (Yee, 2020).

The quality of the contribution of PHEI staff to teaching, research, industry, and the various support activities are vital to the success of individual institutions and the reputation of the sector in general. Hence, one of the initiatives laid out in the 11th Malaysia plan (EPU, 2016) is to provide more opportunities for training of academic

staff, including access to scholarships and loans for their postgraduate studies. Besides, the MOHE has included PHEIs to participate in SETARA rating programme (Sistem Penarafan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia) and MyQUEST (Quality Evaluation System for Private Colleges). In adhering to the plans laid out by the Department of Higher Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (Higher Education Department, 2018), academician needs to undergo several challenges, such as being exposed to the new methods of delivering lectures, proactively getting involved in the publication, and actively seeking self-development. This calls for the academicians in PHEIs to be proactive with an open mindset, and to take on these new ways of working by working collaboratively with all stakeholders on this transformation journey.

In reality, are the academicians in PHEIs proactive in their work? Proactive behaviour in prior studies used to be reflected as a one-dimensional construct (see Fuller & Marler, 2009; Seibert et al., 2001). In this present study, nevertheless, it is best understood as a multi-dimensional construct, inclusive of self-initiated behaviours, such as taking charge, engaging in voice, initiating innovation, and preventing problem (El Baroudi, Fleisher, Khapova, Jansen, & Richardson, 2017; Parker & Collins, 2010). Hashim (2012) pointed out that the academicians in PHEIs lacked creativity, along with a “work-for-living” attitude and without any self-initiative. While looking into the outcome of initiating innovation among the academicians in PHEI, the average number for Scopus article publications for the year 2011 from public universities was 3,032 articles, while 159 articles from private university (Suryani et al., 2013). Similarly, a research performance analysis based on both public and private HEIs in Malaysia using the latest (2014) bibliometric data from the Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) exhibited declining trends; most universities had grown in size, but

only a handful could maintain a high level of impact or quality (Prathap & Ratnavelu, 2015).

### **1.3 Preliminary Study**

This section depicts a preliminary study to unearth additional insights and to further clarify the aspect of being proactive amongst the academicians in PHEIs from the stance of their superior (i.e., Dean) before formulating the problem statement in this study. This preliminary study aims to identify proactive work behaviour among academicians from four dimensions, which are taking charge, voice, initiating innovation, and problem prevention. Four open-ended questions were posed to measure the four dimensions of proactive work behaviours, as further elaborated in the following sections. The duration of the preliminary study was between February 2017 and April 2017.

The sample for the interview sessions was gathered purposefully, first by selecting private universities from the category of PHEIs as shown in table 1.2, next followed by those universities with SETARA rating as this served as a yardstick in determining the proactive involvement of universities to sustain their performances in all aspects, whereby the academicians too would be required to display proactive work behaviour. Finally, deans from different schools and faculties of the universities were approached via e-mail with the interview questions. Upon stating their agreement to participate in the study, they were contacted via a telephone call to conduct the interview. As a result, three deans from various faculties and universities (Universities A (Female, age 43, Faculty of Business), B (Male, age 47, Faculty of Science), and C (Female, age 45, Faculty of Business Management) responded to the request.

University A was founded in the year 1996, and three campuses have been established in Peninsular Malaysia since two decades ago. University A had received several awards from the Ministry of Education in 2014; the Highest Enrolment of Local Students, Excellence in R&D, the Highest Number of Courses Accredited, and Special Award in Recognition of University's Overall Achievement. University A was rated tier 5 (Excellent) in the SETARA Rating for 2010 and 2011.

University B was established in the year 2002 and has two campuses located in the Klang Valley and the state of Perak. The university received a gold award from the Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia (Malaysian Institute of Architects) for its education category in 2013. University B was ranked as one of the top 300 universities in Asia in 2012 and 2013 by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking (Asia).

University C, located in Selangor state, is a non-profit private university established in the year 2001. This university has received accolades as the Best Entrepreneurial Private University and the Tier 5 Excellent University status awards accorded by MOHE. In an international rating exercise undertaken by QS, this university received a Five Star rating for Teaching, Employability, Facilities, Social Responsibility, and Inclusiveness.

### **1.3.1 Findings of the Preliminary study**

The participants discussed the aspects of proactive work behaviour of the academicians in PHEIs based on the four dimensions proposed by Parker and Collins (2010), namely taking charge, engaging in voice, initiating innovation, and preventing the problem. The responses are presented below:

## Taking Charge

Taking charge is defined as “voluntary and constructive efforts by individual employees to effect organisationally functional change with respect to how work is executed within the contexts of their jobs, work units, or organisations” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999, p. 403). In this present study, academicians viewed as taking charge should be predisposed to taking the initiative frequently by offering suggestions to identify an opportunity or to improve a current work situation; put simply, it is often necessary to articulate ideas to bring them to fruition (Fuller et al., 2006). Therefore, the following question was posed,

*To what extent do you think the academicians in this faculty try to institute improved or new methods in executing their duty? For example, via field visit to enrich the delivery of teaching and create new knowledge; to conduct student-oriented learning; to apply blended learning in a lecture class, and others.*

As a result, one of the deans shared that mostly focused on a field visit and industrial talks only. When asked about the barriers that tend to stop them from executing initiatives; lack of motivation, attitude, lack of passion, and mostly, being too complacent emerged as the main factors that hindered the academicians from being proactive.

## Problem Prevention

Problem prevention is self-directed and anticipatory behaviour that addresses recurring challenges and barriers at the workplace (Parker & Collins, 2010; Frese & Fay, 2001). For academicians, problem prevention was investigated by determining if they had tried to find the root cause of things when gone wrong and further probing to overcome the problem. For example,

*To what extent do you think the academicians in this faculty have proposed and developed long-term solution or precaution on a recurring problem in the faculty? (e.g., poor teaching evaluation/assessment and complaints by students) Do academicians who have received poor evaluation or complaints look for an opportunity to improve their teaching delivery and further diagnose/ seek the root cause of it? Are they taking it seriously when issues arise?*

One dean asserted the following:

“It depends. Those who are motivated and responsible would try to improve themselves. However, some do not show any effort to improve themselves despite several communications.” Another dean shared that not many solutions were recommended by the academicians to overcome problems. Upon further probing with questions “why is it so? Has the management taken any action if the problem is not addressed?” A dean responded that the academicians were more careful when they were given written reminders due to the errors that they commit.

### Initiating Innovation

Innovation refers to an idea, a procedure or something that is new and of better quality, whereby innovative activity includes research and development (R&D) activities (Mikula, 2015). The invention process begins with thoughts on how something can be changed. This thought must be tested and implemented after a concept is created (Frese & Fay, 2001). Innovative activities within the context of a university reflect generating new knowledge, developing a new prototype, and introducing a new process. As such, the following question was posed:

*How many per cent do the academicians contribute to research activities through publication in reputable journals (Scopus, Thomson ISI Index), book chapters,*



*external research grants, research collaboration, and consultancy or industrial linkage? Are you satisfied with the research output produced by the academicians in this faculty since the last two years?*

All the three deans gave rather consistent responses. About 21-30% of academicians in the faculty were actively involved in the publication in reputable journals, and this was followed by 11-20% of academicians who actively sought external research grants and research collaborations. Only less than 10% of the academicians were engaged in consultancy or industrial linkage, and publication of book chapters. Overall, all the deans expressed that they were indeed dissatisfied on the research output produced by the academicians in their faculties.

As mentioned by one of the deans:

“Only a handful of academicians are actively publishing. The others depend on their colleagues to publish. I do not see a lot of personal effort from the majority of the academics.”

### Voice

The voice behaviour is concerned about raising issues that seem to affect one's working group and seeking information on those issues. It is defined as “making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109). The question posed related to this aspect is as follows:

*To what extent do you find the academicians in this faculty approaching you personally (via email, phone or face-to-face) to make recommendations concerning*

*issues (e.g. workloads, teaching assignments) that affect the work group? In general, what is the nature of complaints received?*

Apparently, most of the academicians in PHEIs did not approach the Dean frequently to discuss over work-related issues. However, most of them met their immediate superiors, such as Head of Unit or Head of Department or Deputy Dean of Academic. When asked about the participation of the academicians during faculty meetings, one of the deans commented on the following:

“Most of the time, academics are agreeable to any proposal or idea.”

In a nutshell, this preliminary study signified that the academicians in PHEIs lacked taking charge of their work, and displayed limited efforts to rectify or prevent recurring issues. Only a handful of academicians were actively involved in research activities, and most of them passively participated in making decisions. This shows that the academicians did not display proactive work behaviour in PHEIs, thus the pressing need to explore the antecedents for proactive work behaviour amidst academicians within the context of PHEI.

#### **1.4 Research Problem**

In order to survive and thrive in a competitive environment, it is vital for an institution to be always ready to adapt. The different agendas stipulated in the strategic plan have pressured both academicians and institutions to face the harsh reality. Based on the outlined KPI in both public and private higher education institutions, an academician's tasks are not limited to teaching, conducting research activities, and performing administrative tasks; as they are expected to adopt new blended learning, secure research grants, participate in various departmental, faculty, university, national,

and international committees, offer free advice or consultation, and from time-to-time, accomplish other assigned tasks (Ariffin, Ramli, Abdul, Husain, & Wahab, 2011; Chen et al., 2014). Such demanding expectations, rapid progression, and world globalisation have forced academicians to build strong self-preservation to hinder occupational stress (Markom et al., 2012). A comparative study by Safaria et al., (2011) revealed that academic staff in PHEIs suffered from higher occupational stress level than those in public HEIs.

Nevertheless, instead of studying the positive behaviour, such as proactive behaviour, in overcoming the challenges faced, many Malaysian scholars have assessed the negative outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction, low productivity, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intention, as consequences of job stress and burnout (Aisyah et al., 2012; Henny et al., 2014; Malik et al., 2014; Rashed Alshery, Ahmad, & Al-Swidi, 2015). As a matter of fact, people are not always passive recipients of environmental behavioural constraints, as one can change the present scenario intentionally and directly (Crant, 2000). Therefore, this study assessed the positive behaviour, proactive work behaviour in precise, within the PHEIs context, an area seldom studied by researchers.

While there is a burgeoning interest in exploring the proactive behaviour at the workplace, for instance, pharmaceutical firms (see Arefin, Raquib & Arif, 2015), electronic industry (see Sonnentag & Spsychala, 2012), the public sector (see Strauss, Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2015), and the manufacturing domain (see Wu, Kwan, Wu, & Ma, 2015); studies on the service sector, especially PHEIs, appear to be in scarcity.

Upon comparing with other industries, academicians in HEIs with considerable autonomy in their work nature have been expected to shoulder more accountability in

dictating the performance of their institutions. They are expected to identify problems and initiate improvements in their performance before adversely affecting their students' performances. The nature of their work demands them to display proactive work behaviour that places focus on initiating internal organisational change (Parker & Collins, 2010). Nonetheless, based on the preliminary study outcomes, academicians in PHEIs were still perceived as low proactivity in relation to their work.

Studies on the topic of employee's proactive work behaviour within the context of Malaysia are rather limited (Ling, Bandar, Alil, & Muda, 2017) and specified in proactive career behaviour (see Mohd Rasdi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2011), and proactive personality (see Subramaniam, 2015; Yean, Yahya, Othman, & Pangil, 2013), instead of proactive work behaviour. As of to date, studies on proactive work behaviour within the context of PHEIs in Malaysia is scarce. This motivates the present study to explore the level of proactive work behaviour amongst academicians in Malaysian PHEIs.

With the intensified war of talents witnessed in this modern era, the education sector faces challenges to attract and retain good talents. The PHEIs, perhaps more than any other sector, rely on their capacity to attract, retain, and motivate talented staff. The array of HEIs demands the brightest minds, strongly dedicated, highly innovative, and outstandingly creative people who desire to grow and share knowledge with the upcoming generations (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2010). Governments view PHEIs as the key to economic development and success of their countries. Hence, it is critical that PHEIs are considered as 'employers of choice' for the most qualified staff and can compete with, as well as inspire and reward their staff (HEFCE, 2010). Rudhumbu, Chikari, Sivotwa, and Lukusa (2014) assessed the use of employer branding as a tool to attract and retain talent in a private university. The findings revealed that it was essential to evaluate the variables that may

have an impact on the perception of talent for private university being an attractive workplace, as well as the duration the talent would remain in the institution. Employer branding shapes the employees' personal perceived image, which in turn, influences their satisfaction, commitment, productivity, and retention (Robertson & Khatibi, 2013; Miles & Mangold 2005; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Dutton et al., 1994).

In terms of quantifiable elements, such as employee productivity, it is still unclear if employer branding can enhance company performance (Robertson & Khatibi, 2013). In resolving this issue, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggested that it would be necessary to identify a variable that links between employer branding program and firm performance. Wallace, Lings, Cameron, and Sheldon (2013) claimed that employee branding influences the attitudes and behaviour of workers so that the brand identity and values of the organisation are reflected in their work behaviour. Hence, this is certainly a good rationale to investigate the influence of employer branding on employee behaviour, particularly proactive work behaviour.

Since the past decade, studies on the antecedents of proactive behaviour at the workplace had mostly focused on individual variances, such as proactive personality (see Bindl & Parker, 2010) and contextual factors that contribute to proactive behaviour (see Crant, 2000; Parker et al., 2006). In particular, proactive personality, personal initiative, self-efficacy, goal orientation, and the need for achievement all have been determined as personal characteristics that lead to proactive behaviour (Crant, 2000; Parker et al., 2006). Meanwhile, job autonomy, job control, employee trust, managerial support, as well as organisational culture and norms, have been regarded as contextual factors that promote proactive behaviour (Crant, 2000; Ohly & Fritz, 2010; Parker et al., 2006; Sonnentag & Spychala, 2012; Wu & Parker, 2012). Further exploration of more diverse antecedents and boundary conditions that can

affect proactive behaviour has been highlighted (Shin & Kim, 2015), whereby employer branding strategies contained in the present value proposition of employees on contextual factors have yet to be revealed. As such, this study assessed the impact of employer branding on proactive work behaviour amongst academician within the context of PHEIs established in Malaysia.

Being a knowledge-driven business, HEIs are fundamentally people-driven, and therefore, work engagement rates are integral. However, studies in the field of academic engagement within the Malaysian context are rather limited, as most studies tend to concentrate on academic staff turnover intention (see Hassan & Hashim, 2011; Lew, 2009; Long, Thean, Ismail & Jusoh, 2012). For example, a Malaysian private university had recorded a high turnover rate from 14% in 1997 to 37% in 1999 (see Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2011). Another study on a public HEI found that 59% of its academics intended to leave their position (Azmi, 2005). Bhatnagar (2007) and Baumruk (2004) summarised that job commitment appeared to be the most effective way of retaining academicians and ignoring their intention to leave. A number of studies have reported that work engagement served as a key driver of performance and effectiveness (see Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007; Luthans & Peterson, 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Therefore, higher education institutions need to aim to improve their academic staff's dedication to work because engagement leads to improved job results and overall organizational success. Despite the vast studies conducted in this area, it seems difficult to navigate the findings in identifying the key driver that can aid employers to improve work engagement. Needless to say, numerous antecedents and predictors of work engagement have been suggested and identified, but only a few have been empirically tested, and scattered throughout the massive literature base (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Hence, a pressing need is present to

identify the predictors of work engagement, which are vital for engagement in various roles, jobs, and organisations (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008). Kunerth and Mosley (2011) proposed that employer brand management may unravel a significant opportunity to improve the overall level of internal involvement while maintaining the employer's external image. Thus, it would be interesting to identify the impact of employer branding on work engagement.

At times, engaged employees behave differently (Parker & Griffin, 2011), for example, they may participate in proactive activities as part of their in- and extra-role behaviours (Crant, 2000). On the other hand, they may demonstrate less citizenship behaviour or become reactive when the working condition does not lead them to do so. The literature on work engagement has not completely delineated the conditions under which engagement leads to positive behaviours. Alfes, Shantz, Truss, and Soane (2013) had urged more studies to explore the characteristics of the working environment that may be relevant to direct and focus the levels of one's engagement in positive ways. In turn, when employees are appreciated by the organisation, they are more likely to solve the organisational problem and engage in changing behaviour (Arefin et al., 2015).

Evidently, both employer branding strategies and work engagement are closely interrelated (Alzyoud, Othman, & Isa, 2015; Kunerth & Mosley, 2011) and serve as drivers of proactive work behaviour (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008; Sonnentag, 2003). These relationships are built on the basis of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). Meanwhile, based on the Broaden and Build Theory (BBT) proposed by Fredrickson (2000), the broadening of positive emotions can cause individuals to abandon their programmed behaviours as a means to explore more innovative and unique patterns of thoughts and actions. While assessing at the individual level,

positive emotions are linked with higher levels of creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005), whereas positive social self-conscious emotions, such as pride and empathy, display beneficial effects on personal achievement (Zapf & Holz, 2006). In line with this theory, Hartog and Belschak (2007) asserted that a leader can indirectly enhance proactive behaviour of employee by stimulating positive emotions, such as work engagement. Work engagement has recently emerged recently as a vital mediating construct (Rich et al., 2010). Based on the JD-R theory, job resources, such as managerial and supervisor assistance, have the motivating ability to improve work engagement, which in effect facilitates favourable job outcomes (Agarwal et al., 2012). In fact, several studies have evaluated work engagement as a mediator between various job resources and proactive work behaviour (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Sonnentag, 2003). As such, the effect of work engagement as a mediator between employer branding strategies and proactive work behaviour was examined in this study. This study, in particular, attempts to bridge the gaps addressed by associating employer branding and work engagement in light of proactive work behaviour based on a research framework.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions developed for this study are listed in the following:

1. Does employer branding influences work engagement of academicians in PHEIs?
2. Does work engagement influences proactive work behaviour among academicians in PHEIs?
3. Does work engagement mediate the relationship between employer branding and proactive work behaviour among academicians in PHEIs?



## **1.6 Research Objectives**

In order to address the research questions, the following research objectives are presented:

1. To examine the influence of employer branding on work engagement of academicians in PHEIs
2. To examine the influence of work engagement on proactive work behaviour among academicians in PHEIs
3. To determine the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationships between employer branding and proactive work behaviour among academicians in PHEIs

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is in two-fold; theoretical and practical stances.

### **1.7.1 Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretically, this study adds to the knowledge of proactive work behaviour among academicians in Malaysian PHEIs. This study provides new insights to comprehend the essence of employer branding in a holistic manner by acknowledging the association between employer branding and work engagement, thus leading to proactive work behaviour through the lens of Broaden and Build Theory (BBT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). The SET was employed in this study to elaborate on the direct correlations between six employer brand attributes and work engagement; work engagement to proactive work behaviour. Meanwhile, the BBT was adopted to relate the six employer brand attributes with proactive work behaviour through work engagement that served as the mediator in the framework.

Studies pertaining to employee's proactive work behaviour within the context of Malaysia are rather limited (Ling, Bandar, Alil, & Muda, 2017). Although many studies have focused on employee's proactive career behaviour (see Mohd Rasdi et al., 2011), and proactive personality (see Subramaniam, 2015; Yean, Yahya, Othman, & Pangil, 2013) in Malaysian public HEIs, not many have delved into the determinants of proactive work behaviour among academicians in Malaysian PHEIs. Therefore, this study bridges the gap in the research area of proactive work behaviour by providing empirical evidence on the topic area within the setting of PHEIs established in Malaysia.

Some studies regarding employer brand attractiveness were conducted from the stance of external stakeholders (see Berthon et al., 2005; Ewerlin, 2013; Roy 2008; Rosengren, & Bondesson, 2014), while some others focused on the existing staff. Besides, several adjacent publications revealed that exploration of the dimensionality of employer brands has been in scarcity (Hillebrandt, 2012). The development of employer brand and its dimensions is largely untapped in empirical and theoretical undertakings. Although many studies have been conducted lately in light of employer branding, only a handful have placed focus on specific components that determined employee values and their impact on employer branding as a whole (Biswas & Suar, 2013). Hence, this present study adds to the literature on employer branding towards existing employees, apart from discussing this very concept using the six employer brand attributes proposed by Berthon et al., (2005) and O'cass et al., (2011). The data gathered are likely to enhance understanding in this particular area and offer useful information to guide future research work.

Finally, this study provides evidence regarding the mediating effects of work engagement on the relationships between employer brand attributes and proactive