

Talent management practices on employee performance: a mediating role of employee engagement in institution of higher learning: quantitative analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effect of talent management (TM) practices on employee performance (EP) and to explore the mediating role of employee engagement (EE) on the relationship between TM practices and EP in Malaysian private universities (MPUs).*

Design/methodology/approach – *The paper used both descriptive and quantitative approaches, and the unit of analysis of this research consists of MPUs academic staff. The research sample consists of 314 MPUs academic staff, and a questionnaire was used to collect data from the target respondents, while partial least squares-structural equation modelling was used to evaluate the study hypotheses through bootstrapping approach.*

Findings – *The research outcome revealed that TM practices that comprise of talent recruitment practice (TRP), training and development practice (T&DP), compensation practice (CP) have a significant effect on EP. Furthermore, EE partially mediates the relationship between T&DP, CP and EP, while EE does not mediate the relationship between TRP and EP in MPUs.*

Practical implications – *The research suggests that universities management should focus on TM practices as a tool to achieve and maintain EE and positive attitudes (EP) in relation to work.*

Originality/value – *The research makes substantial contributions to the literature by investigating the effect of TM practices on EP through the role of EE as mediation in MPUs. The research is one of the very few studies undertaken in MPUs. Therefore, the results of this research serve as a guide for the universities management to develop their institutional strategies and policies in a manner in which their employees' success can be achieved and encouraged. International Journal of Business and Society.*

Keywords *Talent management practices, Compensation practice, Employee performance, Training and development practice, Employee engagement, Social exchange theory, Talent recruitment practice*

Paper type *Research paper*

(Information about the authors can be found at the end of this article.)

1. Introduction

Employee performance (EP) is regarded as the most important aspect in today's business world for ensuring the sustainability of the organization (Danish and Usman, 2010). Employees are the most important asset of any organization or academic institution for ensuring progress and accomplishment (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). The success and failure of any business mainly depend on its EP towards achieving organizational goals and objectives (Pradhan and Jena, 2017). EP showed a crucial role in the corporate setup and cannot be done without human capital (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). In this perspective, many studies in various endeavours argue that talent managementTM practices are inevitable for

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superior engagement and performance of employees in today's business environment to achieve competitive advantage (Dixit and Dean, 2018).

TM has been acknowledged and recognized within the academic and practitioner literature (Sonnenberg *et al.*, 2014), and also, TM has now been the subject and the focus of all human resource management (HRM) academics since it entered the Management Lexicon in the 1990s. Out of the job of McKinsey experts (Michaels *et al.*, 2001), the TM jurisdiction has earned significant popularity and has steadily developed from childhood to teenager or maturity (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013). Initially, TM was designed to attract, grow and retain employees with the requisite skills and desire to interact more with work to enhance performance and sustain organizational objectives. Recruitment, on-boarding, selection, mentoring, performance improvement, learning and development, career growth, replacement planning, leadership development, job preparation, reward and recognition are the different facets of TM (Scheweyer, 2004). Today, organizations from various sectors face dynamic challenges and patterns such as engagement of staff, efficiency and high-performance standards or expectations (El-Kot and Leat, 2008). Such challenges generate a clear need for managing human resources to achieve a competitive edge and business survival. These breakthroughs call for effective human resource planning in a variety of areas such as job engagement, job satisfaction and organizational efficiency (Fiorito Bozeman *et al.*, 2007). So many organizations have recognized that substantial job-related behaviours like engagement and satisfaction are the key strategic and valuable foundations for their competitive edge (Ologbo and Sofian, 2013).

To gain a competitive edge, organizations need high-energy, efficient and dedicated human capital in their respective workplace (Chen, 2018), as workers with favourable perceptions and attitudes on the job or workplace encourage organizational goals (Singh *et al.*, 2016). In this context, human resources skills, abilities and competencies are very critical in determining employee job engagement and outcomes. Similarly, the effectiveness of an academic or educational institution depends largely on the efficiency of human resources and successful staff management. As usual, academic institutions are expected to hire, develop and maintain their workforce. Therefore, highly qualified and well-motivated academic personnel are much more engaged in their teaching and research work (Lew, 2009). Empirical research has demonstrated that appropriate TM practices enhance and elevate workers in an organization toward achieving a strong sense of engagement and job performance (Shahzad *et al.*, 2008). In addition, Lew (2009) narrated that employees might discharge a crucial role in boosting the ranking of universities in different fields such as university credibility, image, reputation, quality teaching, community growth and academic research as a result of effective TM practices. According to Amin *et al.* (2014), the value of improving academic excellence of most educational institutions rely on TM practices to actualize high job performance, to foster substantial synergies (Wall and Wood, 2005) and also to enhance dedication to work (Christensen *et al.*, 2020). University employee job engagement is vital to educational institutions. In other words, the quality, survival and success of institutions of higher learning cannot be achieved without highly engaged, satisfied and motivated workers (Christensen *et al.*, 2020).

Even though many researchers have addressed higher education concepts of TM (Lew, 2009; Malik *et al.*, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2009), the research work that is in connection to engagement in tertiary education are quite limited (Nazir and Islam, 2017; Daniels, 2016; Wilkins *et al.*, 2017), and also, other personnel-related issues link to participation or commitment in higher education are not well examined (Wilkins *et al.*, 2017). In general terms, a prior study in higher institutions participated mainly on issues such as the morale of academics (Rosser, 2004), employee's job satisfaction (Smerek and Peterson, 2007) and employee's intention to leave (Johnsrud *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, it is vital to recognize how TM practices affect workers towards demonstrating high performance through employee engagement (EE) (Karatepe, 2013). Within this field of investigation, the social exchange

theory (SET) supports the study to understand the correlation between TM practices and the outcomes of employees. [Cropanzano and Mitchell \(2005\)](#) stated that employees are pressed to pay their organization through a sound performance when they receive adequate organizational support. Job engagement is among the reasons in which the relationship between TM practices and work-related behaviour is assumed to play a role ([Karatepe, 2011](#)).

Though the essence of the relationship is becoming inspiring, therefore, based on our knowledge, there is no research work that considers EE as a mediator on the relationships between TM practices (talent recruitment practice (TRP), training and development practice (T&DP) and compensation practice (CP)) and EP in Malaysian private universities (MPUs). In line with that, this is the first research of such nature conducted in MPUs. Moreover, most of the studies within the study variables jurisdiction that are conducted in Malaysia are conducted in other sectors of the economy, not within the educational sector, particularly not within the study scope (MPUs) ([Supraptiningsih et al., 2018](#); [Wadhwa and Tripathi, 2018](#); [Mangusho et al., 2015](#)). Notwithstanding, a new phase unfolds under which engagement and performance of employees are essential to the institution and the economy. Therefore, the need to concentrate on TM practices is vital in achieving and sustaining EP through human capital engagement. After extensive review of related literature on workplace talents, this research seeks to address the knowledge gap by examining the relationship that exists between TM practices (TRP, T&DP and CP) and EP through EE in the Malaysian educational sector, particularly MPUs.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Talent recruitment practice and employee performance

TRP is defined as a process by which organizations locate and attract individuals to fill job vacancies ([Saiih, 2020](#)). TRP is described as an operation that creates a pool of candidates who have the wish to be hired by an entity, from which the suitable ones can be chosen ([James-MacEachern, 2018](#)), while EP is defined as a capable behaviour, actions and outcomes that employees engage his/her self to contribute to organizational goals. EP is basically the results gained by an employee at the workplace ([Diamantidis and Chatzoglou, 2019](#)). The resource behaviour view (RBV) theory argued that the practice of managing employee attraction and recruitment in sourcing competent individuals internally and externally were not only reinforcing strategic resources of the organization and increasing organization individuality, but also to create competitive organizational advantages that have not been realized in the past to better compete against their rivals ([Hatch and Dyer, 2004](#)). According to [Lewis and Heckman \(2006\)](#), the recruitment of key individuals was managed based on the requirements of the strategic role and capabilities in question such that the job positions for the right individuals were identified depending on their value, rareness, inimitability and uniqueness consistent with the RBV theory. Recruitment is one of the factors that influence and strengthen EP, and recruitment implementation, which were not in line with the schedule and which has already been developed, can create issues like poor outcome or performance high concentrations of personnel absenteeism, among others ([Pambagio et al., 2013](#)). With successful recruitment, it would bring in more trained workers so that performance can be achieved and sustained. A successful recruitment plan can have positive effects to improve EE, performance and quality of work ([Patimah, 2015](#)).

Authors around the globe have therefore empirically examined the connection between recruitment and EP, in line with the observational studies performed by [Al_Qudah et al. \(2014\)](#), [Samuel et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Sutanto and Kurniawan \(2016\)](#) revealed that TRP influences EP at various perspectives. In a similar vein, a study examined by [Sutanto and Kurniawan \(2016\)](#) reported that there is a substantial relationship between recruitment and EP in an organization, and also on the effect of recruitment and selection criteria on workers and institutional results. It was established that recruitment is indeed a serious factor of any

organization, as the performance of an organization depends on the quality of its personnel recruited into the organization through recruitment procedures (Ezeali and Esiagu, 2010). Amadu (2014) explored the correlation between recruitment practice and organizational performance in a crucial and empirical manner whereby it was confirmed that a positive connection between recruitment practice and performance exists. More recent empirical studies carried out by Bibi (2019), Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018) and De Silva and Tharanganie (2018) revealed that TRP has a significant effect on EP.

Lastly, the recruitment message affects EP to a large extent as a recruitment message or job announcement attracts candidates that are more eligible to compete for the respective positions, and when chosen, it will inspire them, and they stand to perform extraordinary well because they fully understand or comprehend their job requirements. The study further concludes that practical work predicts to a very large extent as a sort of recruitment message influences EP because it affects position clarification that influences work performance and the perceptions of individuals that the organization was truthful towards them (Breugh and Starke, 2000). Centred on the findings of most past studies on the consequence of recruitment on EP, it is possible to agree with Jolaosho *et al.* (2018), which revealed that recruitment is related to EP in the organization. Therefore, the foregoing hypothesis was developed based on the empirical and theoretical support:

H1. TRP has a significant effect on EP.

2.2 Training and development practice and employee performance

T&DP on EP often encourage growth within employees and the organization itself (Sangakala *et al.*, 2016). T&DP creates benefits for personnel toward enhancing their knowledge, abilities, skills, competencies and behaviour to achieve positive results (Azeem and Yasmine, 2015). T&DP refers to all approaches that organizations use to provide existing and new employees with the required knowledge, skills and other resources to carry out their assigned task (Abdullahi *et al.* (2015b). T&DP is recognized as one of the TM practices that are significant to employees towards achieving positive results in an organization (Sendawula *et al.*, 2018). Previous studies carried out by Sendawula *et al.* (2018), Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018), Azeem and Yasmine (2015), Santoso and Moeins (2019) revealed that T&DP positively influence EP.

However, Smith and Hayton (1999) argued that the T&DP of employees is an important factor that developed the workers towards adaptability to changes as well as adoption to new situations. Accordingly, for employees to perform well towards the achievement of organizational objectives, they must have the abilities and relevant skills and knowledge, and these can only be achieved through T&DP. In addition to the above empirical findings, the SET provides theoretical support (Blau, 1964). Therefore, it is asserted that within the context of work or labour relations, when an organization offers ample T&DP support to its employees, it sends out a message to the workforce that perhaps the organization is taking care of its employees, such workers will then reciprocate by working in a highly productive and successful manner towards achieving the organizational goals (Aguinis, 2009). Therefore, from the above empirical and theoretical supports, this research formulates the hypothesis below:

H2. T&DP has a significant effect on EP.

2.3 Compensation practice and employee performance

CP is considered as one of the key TM practices in an organization. CP is defined as a wide variety of economic and non-economic rewards given to personnel for the services they offer to the organization, and it can be in the form of salary or wages (Rinny *et al.*, 2020). CP is a reward system that an organization provide to individuals in turn for their willingness to

perform various jobs and tasks within an organization (DeNisi and Griffin, 2001). Compensation refers to the extrinsic or intrinsic monetary and non-monetary scheme of incentives that an organization (employer) offers for the energy, expertise and sacrifice made by workers to fulfil job demands aimed at ensuring the organizational objectives (Dowling *et al.*, 2008). Compensation is vital to any organization as well as the workforce. One of the reasons why people work in organizations is for them to be compensated appropriately with a sound CP to attract, retain and motivate competent employees to perform actively towards attaining positive results (Sutoro, 2019).

Prior research carried out by Akhter *et al.* (2013) established a unique connection between perceived CP and EP. Furthermore, in more recent studies examined by Bibi (2019), Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018), De Silva and Tharanganie (2018), Mohd *et al.* (2018), Haque (2019), Sarboini *et al.* (2018) and Sutoro (2019) found a positive relationship between perceived CP and EP.

Theoretically, the SET (Blau, 1964) renders theoretical support for the association between CP and EP. The SET argued that in a social relationship, the reciprocity and good gesture between two parties govern the entire relationship in a situation whereby a good gesture from one party (i.e. employer through TM practices) is returned with a similar good gesture (i.e. employee through performance). In this regard, if an employee perceived that the organization provided him/her with appropriate compensation (both financial and non-financial), then such an employee will tend to reciprocate by putting more effort to achieve positive results. Therefore, the empirical and theoretical support leads to the following hypothesis:

H3. CP has a significant effect on EP.

2.4 The mediation role of employee engagement

EE refers to employee commitment or ability and willingness to work and which help an organization often succeed by continuous discretionary effort (Azmy, 2019). EE refers to the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviours that endorse the connection to work and other personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotion) and active performances (Kahn, 1990). Rucker *et al.* (2011), Zhao *et al.* (2010) and Hayes (2009) argued that in testing mediation, the direct relationship between the independent and the dependent variables must not be a necessary condition, as mediation can be statistically significant in the absence of direct relationships. Furthermore, Rucker *et al.* (2011) recommended that a non-significant direct effect should not be considered as a stopping rule or condition in the process of testing mediation. Therefore, this present study is upheld with the recommendations given by Rucker *et al.* (2011) and Zhao *et al.* (2010).

This research opted for some reasons for EE as a mediator. Firstly, as suggested by Karatepe (2013), EE appears to be a direct motivating force of performance. More precisely, several researchers have established EE as a backdrop to organizational commitment and have examined the effect of EE on organizational commitment (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). Secondly, EE has been identified as an outcome of job satisfaction (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Karatepe, 2013). Basically, based on the ideology of SET principles, workers with high EE levels are much more apt to be in such a trustworthy and reliable relationship towards their organizations and therefore offer their bosses a more optimistic attitude (EP) (Saks, 2006). Consequently, when the employer introduces good TM practices such as TRP, T&DP and CP, workers will be much more interested in their jobs, and that will result in improved positive attitudes and outcomes (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Previous studies revealed that TRP has a significant influence on EP (Bibi, 2019; Wadhwa and Tripathi, 2018; De Silva and Tharanganie, 2018). Similarly, TRP has a substantial effect on EE (Shailashree and Shenoy, 2016). In the same direction, EE has a substantial influence

on EP (Ganyang, 2019; Rana *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, it is expected that EE will strengthen the correlation between TRP and EP. Employee T&DP has a significant influence on EP (Asad and Mahfod, 2015; Padmasiri *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, some studies revealed that employee T&DP has a significant influence on EE (Siddiqui and Sahar, 2019; Sendawula *et al.*, 2018). In a similar vein, EE has a significant influence on EP (Rana *et al.*, 2014; Anitha, 2014). Therefore, it is expected that EE will strengthen the correlation between T&DP and EP. Previous studies revealed a positive and substantial effect of employee CP on EP (Hoque *et al.*, 2018; Bibi, 2019; De Silva and Tharanganie, 2018; Sarboini *et al.*, 2018). Employee CP has a positive influence on EE (Mohd *et al.*, 2018; Azeem and Yasmine, 2015). On a similar perspective, EE has a substantial influence on EP (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Anitha, 2014). In line with the above-examined studies, it is expected that EE will mediate the association between CP and EP. In view of the empirical and theoretical foundation, this research further investigates the mediating effect between TM practices and EP. Therefore, the preceding hypotheses were formulated below:

- H4. EE mediates the relationship between TRP and EP.
- H5. EE mediates the relationship between T&DP and EP.
- H6. EE mediates the relationship between CP and EP.

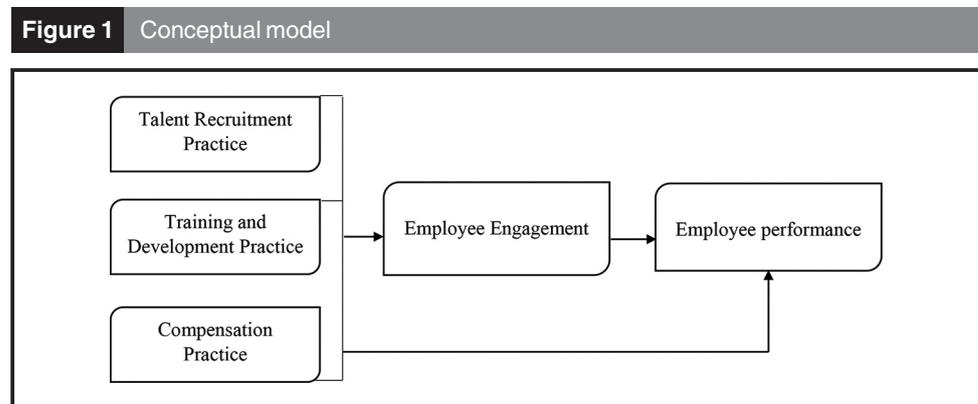
2.5 Research framework

After an in-depth analysis of literature on EE, EP and TM practices, the following theoretical framework was developed.

Figure 1 demonstrates an operational approach connecting TM practices to EE and EP. The model was adapted and modified from both models of Mensah (2015) and El Masri and Suliman (2019) to suit the context of the present study scope (MPUs). The model is a mixture of ideas from the SET. From the SET viewpoint, an organization that acts towards employees in a positive manner generates reciprocity such that employees will behave in a significant way that favours the organization (Blau, 1964). The SET offers a valuable framework for understanding the processes on how workers view and respond to TM practices. Therefore, TM practices are seen as a bet on skilled employees. Competent employees view TM practices as the organization’s generous support and therefore are willing to pay back the organization (performance). The SET helps to clarify the relationship and the processes by which TM practices play an active role to achieve EP via EE.

3. Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature, and a survey research design was used in the present research, and other empirical studies conducted by Nuhu *et al.* (2018), Abdullahi *et al.* (2015b),



Mohammed and Munirah (2018), Abubakar *et al.* (2015), Abdullahi (2018), Abdullahi *et al.* (2019a, 2018, 2015a), Sani Abdullahi *et al.* (2018) and Abdullahi *et al.* (2019b) used the same research design to achieve the necessary goals. The unit of analysis in the present study was teaching staff of MPUs; this group of respondents are expected to provide an accurate view of the content asked. The study population consists of 10,473 respondents that are captured from MPUs that have an un-expired license as of 31 January 2019 as provided by Ministry of Higher Education (2019). In this study, a simple random and stratified sampling method was used, which allows each respondent in the population to gain an equal chance to be chosen as a subject in a sample, and which also enables the researcher to apportion the study sample representing each stratum of the study population without any bias. A total of 371 teaching staff were captured from the study population through Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination. The sample size was subsequently increased by 50%, which amounted to 557 teaching staff to address the non-response problem and to reduce the sample size error (Hair *et al.*, 2010). A questionnaire was used as the data collection technique, while a sum total of 557 questionnaires were distributed to the survey respondents, and a sum total of 314 questionnaires was successfully retrieved. Therefore, after applying a test of data cleaning and screening, there were no missing data or outliers. Based on that, the study proceeded with 314 valid questionnaires amounted to a 56.37% response rate for the final estimation of the study hypotheses. In addition, the present study used the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 to analyze the respondent's profile and preliminary analysis, while partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS version 3.0 was used to test the study hypotheses.

3.1 Measures

This study consists of five variables with 34 items that make up the study variables; in view of that, EP was assessed with nine items adapted from Pradhan and Jena (2017), which were on a viewpoint of task, adaptive and contextual performance. EE was assessed with eight items adapted from Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), which were on a viewpoint of vigour, dedication and absorption. TRP was assessed with five items adapted from Slavković *et al.* (2018). T&DP was assessed with six items adapted from Singh (2004), and CP was assessed with six items adapted from Singh (2004) and Tessema and Soeters (2006). All measurement items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagreed) to 5 (strongly agreed). Pilot studies were carried out whereby validity and reliability were examined on the research instrument; in terms of validity, four academic experts and professionals from the industry were selected to confirm the instrument validity, which includes physical attributes, the significance of items, accessibility, clarity of the language and themes, with this content validity of the items was established (Straub, 1989). Reliability (internal consistency) of the items was also assessed with 40 randomly selected teaching staff with similar characteristics that were not part of the targeted population (Johanson and Brooks, 2010). The result showed that Cronbach's α for EP was 0.871, Cronbach's α for EE was 0.841, Cronbach's α for TRP was 0.916, Cronbach's α for T&DP was 0.882 and Cronbach's α for CP was 0.883. This demonstrates that such instruments are accurate as all Cronbach's α are greater than 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, valid and reliable questionnaires were launched to gather data or information from a representative sample.

3.2 Common methods and non-response bias

This study used the Harman one-factor test to determine if common method bias (CMB) was indeed a potential obstacle (Ali *et al.*, 2020; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The first indicator accounted for 28.87% of the variance, which is below the 50% suggested value in literature (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). Thus, the CMB appears to lack a significant threat in this research paper. Furthermore, to predict the presence of the non-response bias of the study

data, *t*-tests were used to evaluate the significant variation between both the early and late responses. The test results showed that no substantial values were greater than 0.05, which means that the variances were considered to be roughly equal. Therefore, no significant dissimilarities occur between the two classes (early and late responses) in respect to all the variables used in this study ($p < 0.05$). However, the problem of non-response bias was absent, and the samples collected represent the overall population (Ali *et al.*, 2020).

4. Data analysis strategy

To test the developed model, the PLS-SEM technique was used to evaluate the research data. PLS-SEM is a second-generation multivariate technique that can concurrently test the measurement scale (the interactions among constructs and other relevant items) and structural model, with the goal of reducing the standard errors or variances (Hair *et al.*, 2012, 2013; Chin, 2010) – considering the suggestions of Hair *et al.* (2012), the bootstrapping approach (5,000 resamples) was used to assess the significance thresholds for loadings, path coefficients and weights. Furthermore, based on the latest recommendations for PLS-SEM provided by Chin (2010) and Hair *et al.* (2013), this research tested the measurement models before the structural model was tested.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

In respect to the respondent's profile, 314 responses received were found to be valid for the analysis. Based on that, 208 males (66.2%) were the most represented gender in the survey. In total, 217 married participants (69.1%) were the most represented marital status in the survey. In total, 288 Malaysia (91.7%) was the most represented nationality in the survey. In total, 171 Malay (54.5%) was the most represented ethnicity in the survey. In total, 103 participants with 41–50 years (32.8%) were the most represented age group in the survey. In total, 64 participants (20.4%) were the most represented participants that specialized in information technology in the survey. In total, 115 participants with 11–20 years (36.6%) have the highest working experience in the survey. In total, 173 participants with a doctorate degree (55.1%) have the highest academic qualification in the survey. In total, 78 participants with senior lecturer positions (24.8) have the most academic position in the survey, while 93 participants with RM3,000–RM6,000 (29.6) have the highest income in the survey. Therefore, Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

4.2 Evaluation of measurement model

Hair *et al.* (2016) recommended that it is important to evaluate the outer loadings of all variables to determine the reliability of the individual indicators via the PLS-SEM method. Thus, subject to the thumb rule, Hair *et al.* (2016) clarified that items with factor loads between 0.40 and 0.70 could actually be sustained. This research revealed that 28 items out of 34 items were maintained, as indicated in Figure 2 and Table 2. Therefore, this means that due to weak loadings, six items that consist of TDP4, TDP5, TDP6, CP6, EP6 and EP7 were deleted. The 28 remaining items with high loading are held correspondingly in the research model with a factor loading that varies from 0.556 to 0.640. Table 2 showed that composite reliability (CR) varies from 0.849 to 0.897 for all the latent variables (LV), which means that all LVs have an appropriate degree of internal consistency, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2012).

In addition, this research further explored the validity of constructs by examining convergent and discriminant validity. The outcome in Table 2 revealed that the average extracted variance (AVE) value for all latent constructs ranges from 0.516 to 0.662, which meets the minimum AVE value of exceeding 0.50 as recommended by Chin (1998). This research used the Fornell and Larcker (1981) approach to explore the discriminant validity

Table 1 Respondents profile

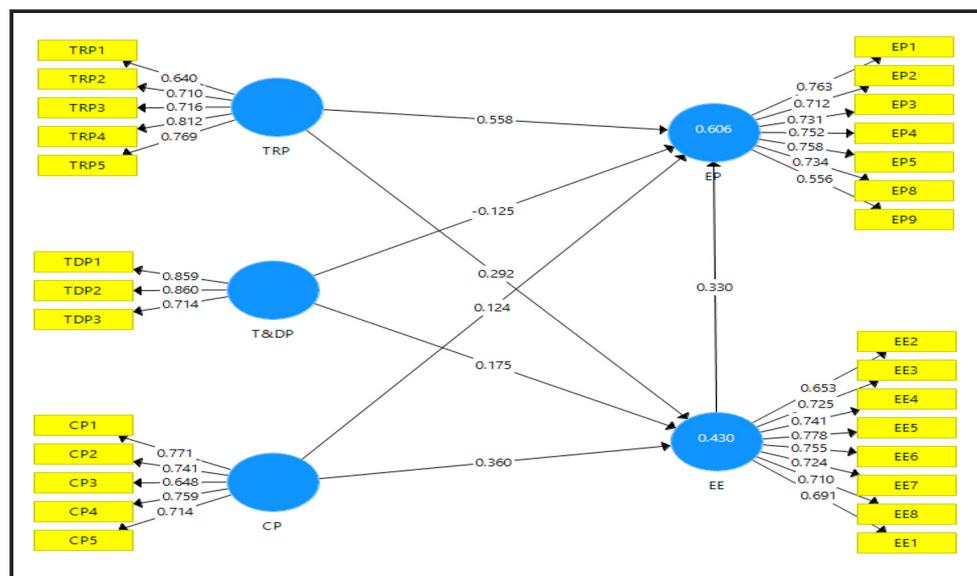
<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Gender		
Male	208	66.2
Female	106	33.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Marital status		
Single	69	22
Married	217	69.1
Others	28	8.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Nationality		
Malaysia	288	91.7
Others	26	8.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Ethnicity		
Malay	171	54.5
Indian	52	16.6
Chinese	65	20.7
Others	26	8.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Age:		
< 31 years	42	13.4
31–40 years	90	28.7
41–50 years	103	32.8
51–60 years	58	18.5
61 years and above	21	6.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Area of specialization		
Engineering	58	18.5
Medical sciences	48	15.3
Information technology (IT)	64	20.4
Business	53	16.9
Social sciences	36	11.5
Humanities	28	8.9
Others	27	8.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Working experience		
< 11 years	81	25.8
11–20 years	115	36.6
21–30 years	68	21.7
31–40 years	36	11.5
41 years and above	14	4.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Academic qualification		
Doctorate degree	173	55.1
Master degree	109	34.7
Bachelor degree	32	10.2
Others	–	–
<i>Total</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>100</i>
Academic position		
Professor	45	14.3
Assistant professor	26	8.3
Associate professor	27	8.6
Senior lecturer	78	24.8
Lecturer	64	20.4
Assistant lecturer	38	12.1
Tutor	29	9.2
Others	07	2.3

(continued)

Table 1

Characteristics	Frequency	(%)
Total	314	100
Income		
< RM3,000	25	8
RM3,000–RM6,000	93	29.6
RM6,001–RM9,000	88	28
RM9,001–RM12,000	55	17.5
RM12,001 and above	53	16.9
Total	314	100

Source: field survey (2020)

Figure 2 Measurement model

by positioning the AVE square root on the diagonal matrix of all latent constructs, and the AVE square roots should be substantially higher than that of the correlations of the latent variables. The results of the analysis, as indicated in Table 3, showed that the square roots of AVE for all latent variables as illustrated in bold are higher than the correlation values.

4.3 Evaluation of structural model

As the parameters used to validate the measurement model have been met, then the structural model was tested. Firstly, the study conducted a collinearity evaluation among the predictor constructs to test the structural models, and the result in Table 3 indicated that collinearity is not a threat as VIF values are obviously below the minimum threshold value of 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2013). The determination coefficient R^2 is the main indicator for evaluating the structural model (Henseler *et al.*, 2012). In addition, Chin (1998) indicated that the R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33 and 0.19 were simultaneously regarded as significant, moderate and low or weak. The R^2 values for EE and EP were simultaneously 0.430 and 0.606 from the results of the PLS algorithm, which provides moderate explanatory or predictive power. The value of Q^2 for EP (0.229) and EE (0.217) are higher than 0 after applying the blindfolding test

Table 2 Items loadings, CR and AVE

Constructs and items	Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
<i>EP</i>		0.841	0.881	0.516
EP1	0.763			
EP2	0.712			
EP3	0.731			
EP4	0.752			
EP5	0.758			
EP6	Deleted			
EP7	Deleted			
EP8	0.734			
EP9	0.556			
<i>EE</i>		0.870	0.897	0.523
EE1	0.691			
EE2	0.653			
EE3	0.725			
EE4	0.741			
EE5	0.778			
EE6	0.755			
EE7	0.724			
EE8	0.710			
<i>TRP</i>		0.781	0.851	0.536
TRP1	0.640			
TRP2	0.710			
TRP3	0.716			
TRP4	0.812			
TRP5	0.769			
<i>T&DP</i>		0.741	0.854	0.662
TDP1	0.859			
TDP2	0.860			
TDP3	0.714			
TDP4	Deleted			
TDP5	Deleted			
TDP6	Deleted			
<i>CP</i>		0.776	0.849	0.529
CP1	0.771			
CP2	0.741			
CP3	0.648			
CP4	0.759			
CP5	0.714			
CP6	Deleted			

Notes: EP = employee performance; EE = employee engagement; TRP = talent recruitment practice; T&DP = training and development practice; CP = compensation practice

(Hair *et al.*, 2013). This showed that the structural model had satisfactory and adequate predictive relevance.

4.3.1 Test of hypotheses.

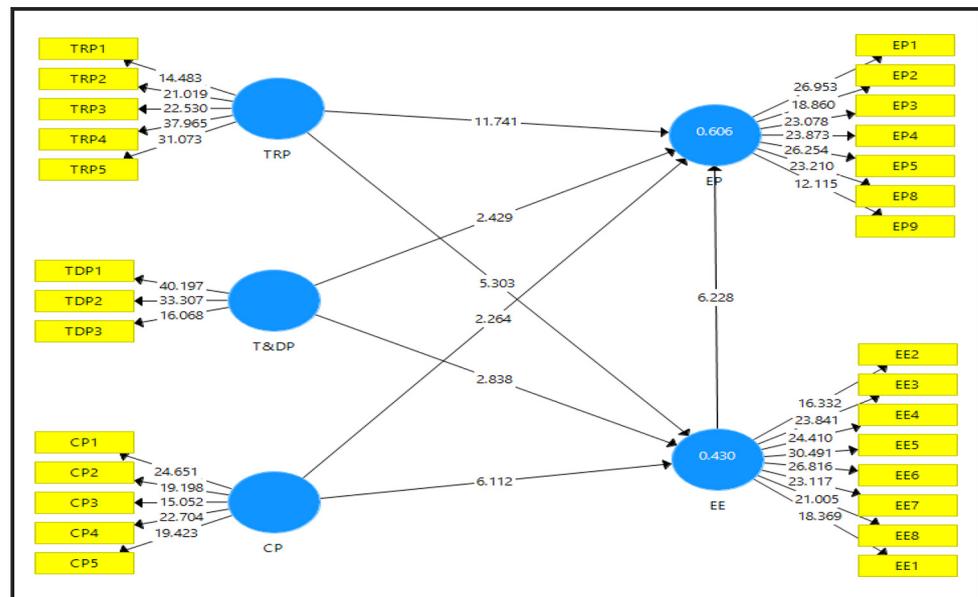
4.3.1.1 Direct relationship between talent management practices and employee performance. To determine the connection between IV and DV such as TM practices (TRP, T&DP and CP) and EP simultaneously, the bootstrapping procedure for PLS-SEM was carried out using 5,000 samples (Hair *et al.*, 2012). The findings in Figure 3 and Table 4 showed that all the three direct hypothesized relationships between TM practices (TRP, T&DP and CP) and EP are significant. Therefore, the findings supported the three stated hypotheses. Briefly, the significant ties include TRP \rightarrow EP ($\beta = 0.558$, t -value = 11.741, $p \leq 0.001$) $H1$; T&DP \rightarrow EP ($\beta = 0.125$, t -value = 2.429, $p \leq 0.05$) $H2$; and CP \rightarrow EP ($\beta = 0.125$; t -value = 2.264, $p \leq 0.05$) $H3$.

4.3.1.2 Mediation test. Hair *et al.* (2014) confirmed that the bootstrapping method was appropriate for mediation evaluation with PLS-SEM. To enable the evaluation of mediation

Table 3 Results of the discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker method) and VIF

Constructs	CP	EE	EP	T&DP	TRP	VIF
CP	0.728					1.862
EE	0.563	0.723				1.753
EP	0.416	0.602	0.718			
T&DP	0.614	0.504	0.324	0.813		1.745
TRP	0.328	0.475	0.709	0.37	0.732	1.331

Notes: EP = employee performance; EE = employee engagement; TRP = talent recruitment practice; T&DP = training and development practice; CP = compensation practice. Diagonals depict the AVE square root, while the off-diagonals depict the correlations

Figure 3 PLS-SEM bootstrapping for direct, indirect and mediation relationship**Table 4** Results of the structural path model for direct effects

Hypothesized paths	Path coefficient	Std. error	t-value	p-value	Decision
TRP -> EP	0.558	0.048	11.741	0.000	Supported
T&DP -> EP	0.125	0.052	2.429	0.015	Supported
CP -> EP	0.124	0.055	2.264	0.024	Supported

Notes: EP = employee performance; EE = employee engagement; TRP = talent recruitment practice; T&DP = training and development practice; CP = compensation practice

effects via the PLS-SEM bootstrapping technique. This research explored the path coefficient for paths “a” and “b” whereby path “a” indicates the connection between IV and MV, and path “b” reflects the connection between MV and DV as described by Hair *et al.* (2014). Eventually, the value of variance accounted for (VAF) was determined to obtain the magnitude of the mediating effect on a given relationship (Hair *et al.*, 2014). It is found in Table 5 that the whole path “a” relationship between TM practices and EE is significant statistically, and the path “b” relationship between EE and EP is indeed significant. Thus, it

Table 5 Results of the structural path model for indirect effects

Hypothesize paths	Path coefficient	Std. error	t-value	p-value
TRP -> EE	0.292	0.055	5.303	0.000
T&DP -> EE	0.175	0.062	2.838	0.005
CP -> EE	0.360	0.059	6.112	0.000
EE -> EP	0.330	0.053	6.228	0.000
TRP -> EP	0.558	0.048	11.741	0.000
T&DP -> EP	0.125	0.052	2.429	0.015
CP -> EP	0.124	0.055	2.264	0.024

Notes: EP = employee performance; EE = employee engagement; TRP = talent recruitment practice; T&DP = training and development practice; CP = compensation practice

also demonstrates the direct path (c) relationships between TM practices and EP in the existence of EE. Therefore, all the hypothesized paths are significant.

VAF value has indeed been determined to assess the size of the indirect effect, meaning to what degree the variances of EP can be described directly by TM practices and to what extent those specific variances can be described by the indirect ties via EE. Hair *et al.* (2014) revealed that a value of VAF less than 20% indicates that there is no mediation effect, whereas the value of VAF above 80% indicates full mediation, whilst partial mediation occurs whenever the VAF value is above 20% but lower than 80%. Table 6 showed that EE mediation effects on the relationship between TRP and EP is substantial ($\beta = 0.096$, t -value= 3.983, $p \leq 0.001$) but a VAF value of 14.7%, which is less than 20%, therefore, depicts that there is no mediation of EE on TRP and EP relationships (no mediation *H4*). The mediation effect of EE on the relationship between T&DP and EP is substantial ($\beta = 0.058$, t -value = 2.690, $p \leq 0.01$) with a VAF value of 31.6%, which is greater than 20%, with that, it showed that EE partially mediates the relationship between T&DP and EP (partial mediation *H5*). Similarly, the mediation effect of EE on the linkage between CP and EP is substantial ($\beta = 0.119$, t -value = 4.260, $p \leq 0.001$) with a VAF value of 48.9%, which is above the threshold value of 20%, with that, it depicts that EE partially mediates the relationship between CP and EP (partial mediation *H6*). In essence, among all the three indirect paths, only two that has partial mediation, namely, T&DP and CP on EP, were partially mediated by EE, while the other relationship between TRP and EP is not found to be mediated by EE.

4.3.1.3 Discussion. The hypothesized *H1* stated that TRP has a significant effect on EP. The study outcome in Table 4 revealed that TRP has a significant effect on EP. This implies that university attraction for recruitment of talented employees is more likely to exhibit higher levels of EP when positioned in the right place, and also recruitment of suitable workers for suitable roles has close relations and ties to the growth of the institution. Therefore, an effective TRP system has a significant effect on increasing the quality of work and results of employees. In a nutshell, recruitment of academic staff in MPUs will enable such staff to achieve efficient results, which will also enable the institution to achieve performance and promote its image as well. The study outcome is in line with numerous past studies (Bibi, 2019; De Silva and Tharanganie, 2018; Wadhwa and Tripathi, 2018), which revealed that

Table 6 Results of the mediation test

Relationships	Path a* b	Std. error	t-value	p-value	VAF	VAF %	Decision
TRP -> EE -> EP	0.096	0.024	3.983	0.000	0.147	14.7	No mediation
T&DP -> EE -> EP	0.058	0.021	2.690	0.007	0.316	31.6	Partial mediation
CP -> EE -> EP	0.119	0.028	4.260	0.000	0.489	48.9	Partial mediation

Notes: EP = employee performance; EE = employee engagement; TRP = talent recruitment practice; T&DP = training and development practice; CP = compensation practice

TRP has a positive effect on EP. The study result is also supported by the RBV theory; the RBV theory established a possibility towards linking recruitment and managing talent resources of the organization to its competitive advantage, and hence, a positive EP enables the organization to achieve high results over time (Rabbi, 2015). This firm theory based on TM postulated that talent was the only organizational resource that ultimately offered a foundation for a lasting competitive edge, and therefore, institutions or firms should concentrate on talent and their potential (performance) as talent helps the institution to achieve or maintain their competitive edge. In addition, this research indicates that MPUs employees may demonstrate higher rates of performance at their respective institution once the institution is fit by matching work descriptions or requirements with employee knowledge and skills (Chew and Chan, 2008).

The hypothesized *H2* stated that T&DP has a significant effect on EP. The study outcome in Table 4 indicated that T&DP has a significant effect on EP. The result implies that when employees are given standardized T&D opportunities, they get motivated and build up confidence towards achieving outstanding performance in their various universities. The result of this study is compatible with previous studies (Sendawula *et al.*, 2018; Wadhwa and Tripathi, 2018; Mohd *et al.*, 2018; Santoso and Moeins, 2019), which stated that T&DP has a significant effect on EP. The result is supported by the SET (Blau, 1964), which centred on the norms of social reciprocity; it is concluded that employees are propelled to demonstrate positive performance in an institution when they believe their employer respects and supports them by providing adequate T&D opportunities (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010).

The hypothesized *H3* stated that CP has a significant effect on EP. The study outcome in Table 4 indicated that CP has a significant effect on EP. This indicates that CP is a predictor of EP in MPUs. Based on the findings, if employees are given a sound reward system (salary, allowances and other fringe benefits), they will be energized to perform more and achieve the stated goals in their various universities. Therefore, the institutions should pay attention to the CP of their employees. The study results concur with the studies of Hoque *et al.* (2018), Sarboini *et al.* (2018), Bibi (2019), Wadhwa and Tripathi (2018), De Silva and Tharanganie (2018), Mohd *et al.* (2018), Haque (2019) and Sutoro (2019), which stated that CP has a significant effect on EP. Theoretically, the SET (Blau, 1964) renders theoretical support for the relationship between CP and EP. The SET argued that in a social relationship, the reciprocity and good gesture between two parties govern the entire relationship. In this regard, if an employee perceived that the organization provided him/her with appropriate compensation (both financial and non-financial), then such an employee tends to reciprocate by putting in more effort to achieve positive results.

The hypothesized *H4* stated that EE mediates the relationship between TRP and EP. The study outcome in Table 6 demonstrated that EE does not strengthen the TRP and EP relationship. Although TRP is a good predictor of EP, the inclusion of EE as mediating variable does not make any sense between TRP and performance. Thus, the consideration of EE between TRP and performance is not expected to play any role in EP in the context of MPUs. The result of the research is guided by the studies of De Silva and Tharanganie (2018). On the other hand, the SET and RBV theory convey that a satisfactory exchange cannot be performed without having perceived value against the sacrifice of the involved parties (Homans, 1961). Therefore, mediation of EE does not take place within the TRP and EP relationship in the context of MPUs.

The hypothesized *H5* stated that EE mediates the relationship between T&DP and EP. The study outcome in Table 6 demonstrated that EE mediates the relationship between T&DP and EP partially. Despite T&DP as a good predictor of EP, the inclusion of EE as a mediating variable yields more value between T&DP and the performance relationship. The possible explanation for the mediation influence of EE in this relationship can be related to employees' opportunistic behaviours (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008). For instance, Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) argued that employees' self-motive and opportunistic behaviours might

influence their actions and behaviours in discharging their assigned duties. In this regard, the employees may consider the T&D opportunity as an opportunity for higher positions in MPUs. The study outcome was guided by previous studies ([Sendawula et al., 2018](#); [Azeem and Yasmine, 2015](#)). On the other hand, the SET conveys that the satisfactory exchange can only be performed without having perceived value against the sacrifice of the involved parties ([Homans, 1961](#)). Therefore, partial mediation of EE took place on the T&DP and EP relationship in the context of MPUs.

The hypothesized *H6* stated that EE mediates the relationship between CP and EP. The study outcome in [Table 6](#) demonstrated that EE mediates the relationship between CP and EP partially. Therefore, a lot needs to be done by the MPUs because CP seems to be an important factor that can enable its employees to achieve performance, which will also enable the universities to achieve their stated goal. Based on the results, it is indicated that when employees receive effective or reasonable CP from their employer, they feel obliged to respond with a greater degree of commitment or engagement, and the employee level of engagement is a function of their perceived notion of the benefits they receive, which enable them to work above expectation to achieve high performance ([Kahn, 1990](#)). The study outcome was guided by previous studies ([Hoque et al., 2018](#); [Mohd et al., 2018](#)). The outcome is supported by SET. Thus, the mediation of EE between CP and EP relationship is logical and justified. Therefore, EE partially mediates the CP and EP relationship in the context of MPUs.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

A conceptual model that depicts the mediating relationship between TM practices and EP was developed and tested in this employee-level research. The results have shown that all TM practices positively influence aspects of EP and decrease negative behaviours among academic staff. Lastly, EE partially mediates the relationship between T&DP, CP and EP, whereas EE did not mediate the relationship between the TRP and EP. We exhibit conclusions from the study results in which TM practices do improve not only EP habits but also decreases counterproductive or negative behaviour. Our research results add to literature mostly on TM practices in the following manner. This is one of the very few research areas that was explored in an academic context, particularly MPUs. In addition, this research contributes to the research of TM practices in Malaysian higher education and beyond. Another vital contribution is that we address issues that are relevant or are in line with TM practices, as well as performance and engagement in MPUs that are not well addressed ([Wilkins et al., 2017](#)).

Furthermore, another strength of this research is that EE has been viewed as a black box process in which institutional factors (TM practices) have a positive effect on the need for subsequent EE research, taking into account its context and outcomes ([Karatepe, 2013](#)). Our research findings, therefore, provide a model and a roadmap for university management to implement sound TM practices to improve and achieve EP. In addition to individual differences (specialization, race, age, gender, responsibility and experience for work), our findings indicate appropriate TM practices can, therefore, enhance the performance of workers in the university. University management, therefore, needs to provide productive institutional tools for the establishment of a professional partnership with employees. It is actually suggested that technical or technological and administrative assistance should be given to workers in educational institutions to achieve higher efficiency. In addition, university management needs to understand the significance of the TM practices and their relevance in fostering EE in the academic work environment where continuous learning or development is required. Universities should develop consistent recruiting strategies to ensure a fit between different institutions because this will assist in maintaining skilled employees. In doing so, universities may use this to exploit their workers to gain a competitive edge. Besides that, when workers are effectively hired and fixed in the

right places and positions, they are much more likely to show higher commitment and show strong attachment to their institutions that help them to achieve success. Furthermore, appropriate training programmes need to be offered to academic personnel to enhance their skills and ensure a consistent cycle of growth. On a similar note, academic employees should indeed be compensated well for effective performance to boost their training and research work. A consequence of this is to honour and recognize academics for their research publications in reputable journals. Lastly, university management should pay much more attention to factors that affect positive and negative behaviours or attitudes towards employees. For example, management should host seminars where input and discussion on the reasons for their negative work-related attitudes like low engagement level, disengagement and attempts to quit can be discussed and addressed.

This research has quite a number of theoretical and practical contributions as other studies; this research also has certain limitations and offers guidance for further studies. Therefore, this study mainly concentrates on TM practices (TRP, T&DP and CP) and EP relationship through EE as a mediating variable. Therefore, other studies may include any other TM practices such as talent review, performance management, succession planning and workforce planning, and may also consider demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, job experience, marital status or education level as a moderating variable to assess how the suggested variables influence the performance of academic employees in a broader view. With that, the present research framework can be extended by including the suggested variables. A questionnaire was used to collect the research data. Therefore, the interview method can be inculcated by future studies. The unit of analysis for the present research is the academic staff of MPUs. Therefore, future studies can include non-academic staff of MPUs for more effective results. Lastly, this research was carried out in MPUs. Therefore, future studies can replicate this study in Malaysian public universities, foreign private universities, other industries or sectors in Malaysia and beyond to compare the outcome.

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Appendix

The questionnaire has two (2) sections: **A & B** (Demographic Profile & Measurement items)

Section A

INSTRUCTIONS: Please kindly indicate your appropriate answer(s) by ticking inside the box.

S/n	Items	Choice	Tick (✓)
1	Gender:	Male	
		Female	
2	Marital Status:	Single	
		Married	
		Others (Please specify): -----	
3	Nationality:	Malaysia	
		Others (Please specify): -----	
4	Ethnicity:	Malay	
		Indian	
		Chinese	
		Others (Please specify): -----	
5	Age:	< 31years	
		31 – 40years	
		41 – 50years	
		51 – 60years	
		61years & above	
6	Area of Specialization:	Engineering	
		Medical Sciences	
		Information Technology (IT)	
		Business	
		Social Sciences	
		Humanities	
		Others (Please specify): -----	
7	Working Experience:	< 11years	
		11 – 20years	
		21 – 30years	
		31 – 40years	
		41years & above	
8	Academic Qualification:	Doctorate Degree	
		Master Degree	
		Bachelor Degree	
		Others (Please specify): -----	
9	Academic Position:	Professor	
		Assistant Professor	
		Associate Professor	
		Senior Lecturer	
		Lecturer	
		Assistant Lecturer	
		Tutor	
Others (Please specify): -----			
10	Income:	< RM3000	
		RM3000-RM6000	
		RM6001-RM9000	
		RM9001-RM12000	
		RM12001 & above	

(continued)

Section B

INSTRUCTIONS: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree by ticking the appropriate number that represents your level of concurrence with the statement as: (1=Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Please remember, there is no right or wrong answer.

Code	Statements	Responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
EP	Employee Performance					
EP1	In my university, I used to maintain high job standards.					
EP2	I am able to handle my tasks in my university without much supervision.					
EP3	I can manage various tasks to achieve my university goals.					
EP4	I perform well to mobilise collective intelligence for teamwork in my university.					
EP5	I believe that common understanding in the university can translate to a feasible solution.					
EP6	I am comfortable with my university's job flexibility.					
EP7	I engage actively in my university group discussion and job meetings.					
EP8	I derive a lot of fulfilment from nurturing others in my university.					
EP9	I share ideas and knowledge with my academic colleagues in my university.					
EE	Employee Engagement					
EE1	I like going to my university and work when I get up in the morning.					
EE2	I can continue working for a very long period of time at my university.					
EE3	I feel strong and confident in my university job.					
EE4	My university job is challenging for me.					
EE5	I am inspired by my university job.					
EE6	I am proud of the job I do at my university.					
EE7	It is hard to get detached from my university job.					
EE8	I am happy when I work intensely in my university.					
RP	Talent Recruitment Practice					
RP1	My university spends substantial resources on finding suitable candidates for positions.					
RP2	My university uses an unbiased process to find suitable candidates for positions.					
RP3	My university uses different sources to find potential candidates for positions.					
RP4	My university uses various strategies to recruit talented candidates.					
RP5	My university is trying to incorporate candidates who can think creatively.					
T&DP	Training & Development Practice					
TDP1	My university conduct thorough training programmes for its staff in all aspect of quality.					
TDP2	In my university, staff in each department go through training programmes every year.					
T&DP3	In my university, the need for training is recognised through a formal performance assessment system.					
TDP4	In my university, there are formal training programmes to educate new staff on the skills they need to perform their jobs.					
TDP5	In my university, staff are imparted with new skills and knowledge on a regular basis to work in a team.					
TDP6	In my university, the training needs identified are useful, and they are based on my university's business strategy.					
CP	Compensation Practice					
CP1	My university has an attractive compensation system.					
CP2	My university has attractive compensation that encourages effective performance.					
CP3	My university has attractive compensation that reflects the standard of living.					
CP4	In my university, compensation is determined based on the employee's skills and experience.					
CP5	In my university, salary and other benefits are comparable to the education sector standard.					
CP6	In my university, compensation is directly linked to staff performance.					

Thank you very much for sharing your valuable experience and time in completing the questionnaire.

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