



# Learning Organization and Organizational Commitment as Perceived by Academics in Malaysian Tertiary Education Institutions

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**Abstract.** This study intends to determine possible relationships between learning organization and organizational commitment among lecturers in three reputable universities in Malaysia, namely, University Putra Malaysia (UPM), University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and University Malaya (UM). Besides, the paper employs descriptive correlational design after collecting all data through questionnaires distribution. In addition, the study utilizes inferential statistic to examine the extent of the associations between two variables that are, learning organization and organizational commitment. Learning organization and organizational commitment in the study reveal high and positive correlation. Most importantly, the study further suggests the establishment of human resource development system to cultivate, in the basis of learning organization, a learning culture. Simultaneously, organizational commitment should be developed, maintained and enhanced. Undoubtedly, new and suitable policies are needed for successful implementation.

**Keywords:** Learning Organization; Organizational Commitment; Academic Lecturers; Inferential Statistics; Malaysian Higher Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The unpredictable effects of globalization and information technology on societies have prompted organizations to change and learn at fast pace (Brooks, Weatherston & Wilkinson, 2011). Other than that, learning culture development assists members of any organizations in generating new knowledge and staying dynamic (Joo, 2010). In line with this matter, there will be no exception for educational institutions, where they have to make arduous and fast decisions to develop a learning culture as well as be ready for any changes (Joo & Park, 2010).

In fact, conventional management is no longer being put into practice. Subsequently, managers should develop learning organization practices to access the right knowledge to ensure higher level of education remain competitive in the global atmosphere so as to accomplish tactical goals for those institutions (Francis, 2014). Moreover, educational organizations with improved learning and experimentation culture, plus being risk takers are inclined to have high organizational commitment level (Filstad, 2011).

Previously, studies have mainly focused on learning organization and learning culture. However, such studies have rarely emphasized on the relationship between the aforementioned learning concepts and organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment. Strategically, in order to become more competitive in the new millennium, offering best learning culture and maintaining staff organizational commitment are vital for education institutions.

## Problem Statement

Academic staffs in educational institution are mainly involved in teaching, supervision, publication, consultation and any other assigned tasks given by their superiors. These high-skilled duties entail full staffs' commitment. Accordingly, Gangai and Agrawal (2015) discover that such fully committed academic staffs normally perform better than their colleagues, rarely miss their works, remain longer in their careers and actively participate in organizational behaviors. Yet, empirical studies demonstrate unsatisfactory organizational commitment level in Malaysian tertiary education institutions (Kassaw & Golga, 2019). The situation may be due to by higher turnover and incompetent academic lecturers in those institutions (Manogharan, Thivaharan, & Abd Rahman, 2018).

Therefore, the problem of inadequate high skilled academic staffs occurs. Such problem, in addition to bothersome lecturers' turnover rate, will likely incur higher cost to the organizations and their reputations. As such, Kim, et. al. (2016) affirm the main reason of increasing turnover rate among academic staffs is due to their low career commitment. It is important to note that the relationships between staffs' turnover, absenteeism and commitment are inversely related.

Despite the fact that there are several factors which can influence organizational commitment, such as learning opportunity, environment and place of work learning, team learning, staffs' collaboration and communication, few studies demonstrate that learning organization plays a crucial role in organizational commitment in higher education institutions (Balay, 2012).

Notwithstanding, the realization of the function of learning organization is imperative in escalating organizational commitment level, studies on learning organization and its association with organizational commitment are still very limited. Thus, this study focuses on learning organization and organizational commitment relationships in Malaysian public higher education to fill the gap of scarce studies in this specific matter.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Learning Organization

From various studies done in numerous organization, there have been several definitions regarding learning organization concept. Learning organization connotation by Dibella(1995) and Dibella, Nevis & Gould (1996) are more suitable to be used, while discussing about the term in the context of institution of higher education. Örtenblad (2018) further articulates the concept of learning organization as the improved learning ability and change in an organization. Specifically, Palos and Veres Stancovici (2016) define learning organization as continuous and transformed learning. They describe learning as

*“a continuous strategically used process: integrated with, and running parallel to work.” (Palos & Veres Stancovici, 2016, p. 8).*

To ensure effective organizations' response to its environment, Saadat and Saadat (2016) state that behavior improvement and capabilities of individuals are two major elements in organizational learning. Moreover, Rijal (2009) mentions about three crucial factors in learning organization, namely learning environment support, true process of learning and reinforcement leadership behavior. Apart from that, Senge (1990) stresses that members in an organization learn more when they, psychologically feel harmless, are aware of their dissimilarities, promote risk takings and have leaders who listen to them. Although individual learning is not similar to organizational learning, both are interdependent. Senge, (1990) emphasizes teamwork learning for successful learning organization. Concisely, group-level learning is essential should the organizations encounter ever more complex situations.

### Organizational Commitment

Other than being multi-dimensional constructs, organizational commitment denotes commitment of attitudes and behaviors. Generally, both attitudinal and behavioral commitments are set of affective component where the former refers to individuals' relation to their organizations, whereas the latter signifies behavioral interchange relationships between personnels and organization. In attitudinal commitment, instead of bringing good impacts to the organizations, staffs are attached to their organizations through unbeneficial interests, such as, pension and tenure. Contrastingly, behavioral commitment requires employees to be confined within their particular organizations (Jaros, 2007).

Al-Jabari and Ghazzawi (2019) assert that organizational commitment is comprised of three facets, particularly, affective, continuance, and normative. These three commitment categories establish various academic staffs' relationship with their organizations, which involve psychological connection. Moreover, academicians associate with affective commitment prefer to stay working in the organizations as they get

emotionally involved in and attached to their organizations. On the other hand, employees with continuance commitment remain in their workplaces, since they are aware of the costly effects of quitting their jobs in the organizations. Furthermore, academic staffs consort with normative commitment feel that they are obliged to remain working in the same organizations.

### **Learning Organization and Organizational Commitment Relationship**

Empirically, there have been some studies done on the relationships between learning organization and organizational commitment. A study by Forozandeh, et. al. (2011) discover that commitment among employees in organization is increased through participation in training and learning activities. In addition, Lim (2010) notices positive and significant relationships, though weakly correlated, between learning organization culture, job satisfaction and organizational commitment through various study instruments that are related to those subjects. Likewise, Wang and Yang (2007) affirm their study among Chinese enterprises on the same topic regarding organizational commitment, learning organization culture and job satisfaction as positive and significant relationships, albeit moderate relationships. Later, Dirani (2009) supports Wang and Yang's findings with same result of the significant and moderate relationships between the three variables.

Joiner and Bakalis (2006) discover that there is a positive and strong correlation between colleagues' supportive collaboration and organizational commitment. Lok and Crawford (2004) assert that culture is vital in organizational commitment, where supportive and innovative cultures positively impact organizational commitment, while bureaucratic culture negatively impact organizational commitment.

In Korea, Joo and Lim (2009) analyze the relationships between organizational learning culture, perceived job complexity and proactive personality and organizational commitment. The study conveys positive and significant correlations between those variables. Apparently, it also reports that important provisions, namely continuous learning, team learning, empowerment, and connection system and leadership strategy in organizations, have made staffs becoming more attached and loyal to the organizations.

In different school teamwork setting, Dee, et. al. (2006) classify four primary team types, namely, team teaching, curriculum development, administration, and school community and their relations to organizational commitment. In addition to that, they pinpoint that team teaching and curriculum teamwork have stronger effects on organizational commitment than the other two structures.

To sum up, first of all, all studies have rarely mentioned about the distinctive learning levels, i.e. individuals, team, and organization, when analyzing them in organizational perspective. Next, the two concepts, learning organization and organizational learning are used interchangeably, albeit the obvious distinction in the meanings between them. Lastly, previous studies have lacked further analysis of action necessities in generating learning organizations' cultures in relation with organizational commitment constructs, in particular, affective, continuance and normative commitments. Hence, this research is intended to study the relationships of aforesaid concepts of learning organization and organizational commitment theoretically and empirically.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study was designed so that it can specifically seek the following goals:

- a) To determine the level of learning organization as perceived by lecturers in selected public universities;
- b) To determine the level of organizational Commitment as perceived by lecturers in selected public universities;
- c) To determine the relationship between learning organization and organizational Commitment in selected public universities.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Firstly, this study utilizes the method of descriptive correlational design after collecting all data through questionnaires distribution. In addition, the study utilizes inferential statistic to examine the extent of the associations between two variables that are, learning organization, independent variable and organizational commitment, as dependent variable. The study is considered descriptive due to its description features in data variables under study.

Secondly, the study occupies quantitative approach to enable the variables' analyses being processed and measured empirically. Parametric statistics is employed to examine discrepancies in learning organization and organizational commitment in terms of distributions of means and frequencies.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Organizational Learning Level

Table 1 illustrates the level of organizational learning with overall mean and standard deviation for learning organization section. The result specifies that out of 361 respondents, 264 academicians (73.1%) show high learning organization level, while the balance of 97 academic staffs (26.9%) indicate moderate learning organization level. Moreover, learning organization is divided into three levels corresponding to average scores obtained, specifically low, moderate and high levels, through the study result of means, standard deviations, frequency and percentages. In view of that, the mean score of 3.82 in learning organization with a standard deviation of 0.291 entail that level of perception of learning organization's perception among academicians are high. As a result, due to academicians' high skilled tasks include teaching, researching, consultation and supervision, they are required to continuously develop their knowledge, skills and expertise, respectively.

**Table 1:** *Descriptive statistics of organizational learning level*

Levels	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
			3.82	.291
Low (1-2.33)	-	-		
Moderate (2.34-3.66)	97	26.9		
High (3.67-5)	264	73.1		

### Organizational Commitment Level

**Table 2:** *Descriptive statistics of organizational commitment level*

Levels	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
			3.86	.377
Low (1-2.33)	-	-		
Moderate (2.34-3.66)	97	26.9		
High (3.67-5)	264	73.1		

Table 2 depicts the perceptions' result of dependent variable, namely, organizational commitment. The study conveys respondents' high perception of organizational commitment (73.1%), whereas the rest of academicians in the sample show moderate level of organizational commitment (26.9%). The outcome, thereby, suggests high perception level of organizational commitment among academicians. The high perception of commitment among academicians in educational sector is further supported with the study's high mean of 3.86 and standard deviation of 0.377. Thus, this result is consistent with previous literature discussed earlier on organizational commitment among academicians. The findings confirm that lecturers deem their jobs as imperative to them, they are bound to contemplate any difficulties faced by the institutions as their own, they are emotionally involved in their institutions, and as a result, they are content to remain in the same organizations.

### Learning Organization and Organizational Commitment Association

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to examine the relationship between organizational learning and organizational commitment. Its objective is to determine the existence of the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment. Thus, hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment. By means of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients, Table 3 unveils learning organization and organizational commitment relationships.

**Table 3:** *Learning organization and organizational commitment relationships*

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	B	SEB	β	t	Sig.
	.743	.552	.550					
Constant				.187	.175		1.064	.288
Learning Organization				.960	.046	.743	21.020	.000***

### *Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment*

As disclosed in Table 3, the result proves that learning organization and organizational commitment are positively and significantly correlated with R value of 0.74 and t value of 0 (sig=.000). In addition, R2 value = 0.55, simply demonstrates that predictor variable, learning organization, explains about 55 percent of the variance in organizational commitment. Table 4 also displays the estimated model coefficients for B with  $b_0 = 0.187$  and  $b_1 = 0.960$ . Thus, the following is the estimated equation model for this study:

$$Y (\text{Organizational Commitment}) = .187 + 0.960X_1 + e$$

The finding indicates that each unit of learning organization increases will definitely raise organizational commitment by 0.96, as well. Empirically, the study verifies that should the learning organization is practiced in higher education institutions, the overall organizational commitment will escalate.

This study of positive, significant and high relationship between overall learning organization and overall organizational commitment is consistent with previous researches done in Malaysia and China, respectively (Ahmad and Abu Bakar, 2003; Joo and Lim, 2009). In short, the results divulge that academicians are highly committed to their institutions, due to their psychological attachment and emotional connection with their organizations, which exceed cost and moral obligations. Furthermore, the findings implies that the higher the practices of learning organization, the higher the organizational commitment.

The study outcomes denote that role of universities' leaders are crucial in promoting learning environment in learning organizations. Besides, universities' leaders are portrayed as coaches in enhancing the relationship between learning organization and staffs' organizational commitment. Furthermore, the result indicates that improvement in organizational commitment can be accomplished by providing continuous learning opportunities, necessary information and transparent institutional decision making process.

## **CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATION OF STUDY**

In a nutshell, the study substantiates two major findings. First, it demonstrates positive linear relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment at the above-mentioned universities in Malaysia. The correlation result between learning organization and organizational commitment is positive and significant. Therefore, the finding connotes that practices in learning organization enrich organizational commitment among lecturers in Malaysian higher institutions.

### **Research Contribution**

Prior studies have proved that learning organization has significant impact on organizational commitment, especially in the advanced countries. The study outcome has further demonstrated that institutions results of this study have shown that universities have gained from learning organization practices. Moreover, this study strengthens the importance of Watkins and Marsick's learning organization (see Dibella, 1995) in affecting organizational commitment among academic staffs at selected Malaysian higher institutions. Likewise, the positive and significant association between learning organization and organizational commitment validate commitment theories, in which learning organization is served as a catalyst for staffs' commitment development and enhancement. This empirical educational study certainly gives value added to the organization literature concerning learning organization and organizational commitment relationships.

The finding has successfully shown that learning organization and organizational commitment are highly correlated; consequently, organizational commitment will rise along with the practices of learning organization. The result is also consistent with the acceptance of main objective whereby the predictor variable, learning organization, has positive and significant correlation with the dependent variable, organizational commitment. This study contributes to the organization literature by filling the study gap on two concepts connection between learning organization and organizational commitment. In fact, learning organization is vital in improving academic staffs' commitment in Malaysian higher education institutions. Due to strong learning organization and organizational learning connection, universities' management and policy makers should focus more on learning organization practices for better lecturers' commitment.

### **Research Implications**

This study touches not only theoretical implication, but practical aspects as well. Therefore, this study particularly provides thorough empirical evidence about organizational commitment in Malaysian tertiary education.

In the last three decades, the focal point of the organizational learning studies had been on the theoretical aspects (Harris & Gokcekus, 2000; Dirani, 2009, among others). To emphasize, the present study, with the focus in educational areas, enhances knowledge concerning administrators in education. Thus far, there have been very limited studies that have discussed about learning organization in both theoretical and empirical aspects in higher Malaysian institutions. Hence, current research definitely gives value added and offers beneficial input to researchers, decision makers in the discipline of organization development.

On the whole, this research recommends universities in Malaysia to apply learning organization to foster organizational commitment. Therefore, the important findings concerning learning organization and organizational commitment associations in this study contribute a lot to educational leaders, especially in higher education in Malaysia. In educational settings, this study also contributes in forming rudimentary theoretical underpinning for organization development and imparts realistic road map in the development of organizational commitment development.

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