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## Association Between Career Development and Readiness to Change with Adaptive Performance: A Preliminary Study Among Lecturers

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### Abstract

Individual adaptive performance is among the prominent behaviours underlined as necessary for an organisation to function effectively. Therefore, the current study was conducted to identify the internal consistency of adaptive performance, which was adopted from the work of Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) and adapted specifically in the context of the Malaysian education industry. It also included an examination of the association between readiness to change and career development with employee adaptive performance. To this end, the study was conducted at one of the public higher institutions established in Malaysia. The findings showed good internal consistency for the instrument adopted within the studied context, as well as a significant and positive association between readiness to change and career development with employee adaptive performance. Henceforth, this paper provides a better view for the use of the proposed instrument in order to encourage further in-depth research specifically on adaptive performance among lecturers. Additionally, a detailed analysis geared towards examining the relationship between readiness to change and career development with adaptive performance will be possible in the future, on top of the contributory effect of the current findings to the existing literature.

**Keywords:** Adaptive Performance, Career Development, Readiness To Change, Reliability Analysis, Tertiary Education

### Introduction

The adoption and use of technology have nowadays become imperative in society and business both in order to remain relevant and competitive. The recent COVID-19 pandemic led to the government's decision to introduce a movement order control (MCO), which affected all business sectors indiscriminately. From that point onwards, what is known as 'the new norms' are fast becoming the new way, which includes the daily practice of work-from-home and homeschooling. Such situation has resulted in the usage of various technological platforms among employees, organisations, and

homemakers alike. Such platforms encompass Application (Apps), online banking, digital malls like Shopee and Lazada, online classrooms like Google Classroom, and many more for the purpose of aiding and managing one's daily routine.

In particular, adaptive performance has been underlined separately from the employee performance dimension (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). Conceptually, it refers to the behaviour exhibiting the ability to manage and cope with situational changes and to transfer learning from one task to another due to the varying job demands (Allworth & Hesketh, 1999; Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010). Therefore, it is highly necessary for employees to display their flexibility and perform well in the fluid and changing environment, which can then lead to a higher individual job performance (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Solberg, 2017). This will subsequently yield organisational competitiveness accordingly.

In the context of academic sector, particularly the higher institutions, all lecturers must now accept the new norm wherein all physical class activities are to be suspended temporarily. Furthermore, online learning and other work-from-home activities have collectively brought many changes to the current teaching and learning structure and shifted the manner they are carried out, thereby possibly impacting their work performance. Hence, those wielding excellent performance throughout the changing environments are said to have high adaptability, whereas their peers who fail to do so are described as having low adaptability. This renders it highly crucial for higher institutions to hire employees who are responsive towards facing environments filled with uncertainties (Reeves & Deimler, 2011), including the introduction of new teaching and learning methods.

Furthermore, the areas of adaptive performance have been extensively investigated by many scholars specialised in organisational behaviour (e.g. Bravo & Ostos, 2020; Park & Park, 2019; Shahidan, Hamid, & Ahmad, 2017). The dimension is also heavily studied by industrial practitioners due to the increasing demands for all industries to be capable of coping with the current economic requirements (i.e. Industrial Revolution 4.0) so as to remain competitive and relevant (Shoss, Kueny, & Jundt, 2020). Moreover, industrial practitioners have further underlined the importance of adaptive behaviour (Fuller, Raman, Wallenstein, & Chalendar, 2019), wherein the lack of adaptability can be severely detrimental to organisations and subsequently impacting the national economy.

In addressing the importance of keeping oneself abreast with the current technological adoption, Malaysian Productivity Corporation (MPC) has realised the necessity of a future workforce equipped with digital literacy, future digital readiness, and digital competencies (Ministry of Education, 2015; Malaysia Productivity Corporation, 2017). Statistically, the level of future digital readiness among Malaysians displayed an incremental trend from the year 2015 to 2018 (*Malaysia in the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook 2018*). This observation suggests that the population is unready to embrace future digitalisation and a distinct lack of skills in navigating the current digital needs is palpable.

Besides, Malaysian-based scholars have typically concentrated more on studies of adaptive performance for the domestic population (Arshad & Malik, 2015; Shahidan et al., 2017). Hence, there is scholarly demand (Bibi, 2020) to further explain the conceptualisation of adaptive performance particularly the need to use multidimensional scale in assessing conceptualisation of adaptive

performance. Regardless, the scarcity of understanding pertaining its conceptualisation, particularly in the context of Malaysia, has resulted in the insistence for more research efforts. Therefore, the aims of this study are firstly, to further clarify the internal consistency of adaptive performance measurement specifically in terms of the local education sector and secondly, to identify the association between readiness to change and career development with adaptive performance among the lecturers.

## Literature Study

### Adaptive performance

Adaptive performance is typically associated with claims of its ability for improving the aspect of employee work performance and employee satisfaction at the workplace (Cullen, Edwards, Casper, & Gue, 2014; Shoss et al., 2020). It is not a new concept in the field of individual work performance dimensions; adaptive performance has been explored in many studies across different contexts. However, the variation in its conceptualisation has yielded numerous viewpoints on the concept itself, which are further supported empirically.

For example, individual adaptability has been theorised as an outcome of task performance (Kozlowski et al., 2001), adaptive expertise (Carbonell, Stalmeijer, Könings, Segers, & Merriënboer, 2014), and individual difference constructs (Mäder & Niessen, 2017; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Besides, individual adaptive performance is conceptually implied as an individual's ability to alter their behaviour with respect to the demands positioned by environments, events, or new situations (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). Similarly, it is associated with the extent in which employees have the ability to cope, respond, and support changes through either reactive, proactive, or tolerant behaviours (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Huang, Ryan, Zabel, & Palmer, 2014). Despite the different manners in which adaptive performance is employed, this study adheres to the notion wherein employees are required to alter their behaviour in response to the demands encountered in new or changing environments and situations (Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel, 2012).

In support of its exclusion as part of individual work performance, (Koopmans, Bernaards, Hildebrandt, Schaufeli, de Vet, et al., 2011) have argued that in line with the increasing complexity and uncertainties encountered in the work environment, adaptive performance is no longer acceptable to be grouped under task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive behaviour. Similarly, several scholars (e.g. Allworth & Hesketh, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Joung, Hesketh, & Neal, 2006) have also justified this notion with empirical evidence, thereby underlining it as a separated dimension separate from individual work performance. Furthermore, adaptation happens across cultural diversity and organisational contexts, subsequently resulting in the growing need to acknowledge the importance of adaptive behaviour. To this end, Carpini, Parker, and Griffin (2017) have noted that studies conducted on the dimension of work performance increased two-fold from year 2005 to 2015.

Then, the efforts of extending the literature on adaptive performance have resulted in the introduction of eight taxonomies of adaptive performance by Pulakos et al. (2000). Collectively, it consists of 68 items and is known as the Job Adaptability Inventory (JAI), which serves to assess adaptive behaviour. The taxonomies are: (1) handling emergencies or crises; (2) handling work stress;

(3) solving problems creatively; (4) dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations; (5) learning work tasks, technologies, and procedures; (6) demonstrating interpersonal adaptability; (7) demonstrating cultural adaptability; and (8) demonstrating physically-oriented adaptability.

Following this, Griffin and Hesketh (2005) have reduced JAI between 18 to 20 items. Meanwhile, the I-ADAPT Theory introduced by Ployhart and Bliese (2006) explains that distal continuum (e.g. knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics) is unlikely to be affected by situational factors, whereas proximal continuum (e.g. situational perception) is more strongly related to performance. Meanwhile, various constructs have also been developed but restricted to specific contexts, such as adaptive performance among pilots (Chen, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005) and law enforcement in the United States of America (Allen & Frame, 2018). Regardless, the importance of understanding how employees adapt to a changing environment cannot be denied as the consistency and clarity of adaptive performance remain rather lacking (Allen & Frame, 2018; Iskandar & Burhan, 2018; Park & Park, 2019).

In acknowledging the increasing interest on the adaptive performance conceptualisation, Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) have argued the importance to employ a multidimensional scale in order to further understand the dimension of individual adaptive behaviour across various contexts. This has resulted in a multidimensional scale of adaptive performance, which can be applied in diverse contexts and consists of a 19-item scale measuring its five dimensions, namely: (1) creativity, (2) reactivity in the face of emergencies, (3) interpersonal adaptability, (4) training effort, and (5) handling work stress (Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel, 2012). Therefore, this study will adhere to the conceptualisation proposed by Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) in understanding the measurement construct in the context of lecturers in Malaysia.

Additionally, the studies of adaptive performance in terms of Malaysia have not been overlooked. In particular, several scholars (e.g. Iskandar & Burhan, 2018; Guan & Madihie, 2014; Nawawi & Halim, 2013; Shahidan et al., 2017) have recognised the importance of identifying its predicting factors in a specific context, such as among psychology officers (Nawawi & Halim, 2013) and professional officers (Guan & Madihie, 2014). Therefore, in consideration of adaptive performance as a separate dimension of individual work performance, the development of its construct, and its application that has gained attention from scholars locally, it is worthwhile to validate the multidimensional scale of adaptive performance usage in terms of Malaysia, specifically among lecturers in higher institutions.

### **Readiness to Change and Adaptive Performance**

When an individual is ready for change, their inner belief will lead to positive perception and belief, thus resulting in adaptive behaviour with the current changes in work practice. The manner in which the employee perceives the environment can determine whether they are to accept or reject such changes (Benzer, Charns, Hamdan, & Afafe, 2017), wherein readiness may be conceptualised as their attitude towards the change (Vakola, 2014).

Readiness to change is a multidimensional construct involving individual, group, and organisational-level of readiness (Vakola, 2013). Specifically in the organisational context, 'readiness' is set among its 'actor' or employee. When an employee is perceived with this construct, the group and

organisation alike will be in a state of constant readiness and subsequently adaptive performance can be achieved accordingly (Shah, Irani, & Sharif, 2017). In contrast, its absence manifested as an increase in uncertainty, anxiety, and stress can be detrimental to the individual and organisation both. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the association between readiness to change and adaptive performance.

### **Career Development and Adaptive Performance**

One of the strategies and methods commonly practised by an organisation to attract and motivate its employees is by offering career development (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2017). However, career development itself is can be viewed as a multifaceted concept encompassing the personal-meaning making concept and process of self-realisation (Chen, 2003). When employees feel the need to remain relevant in their workplace, it is important for them to act and behave according to the requirements of the new job practice, which may result in a longer period of employment.

In a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, lecturers must adapt with the different methods of teaching and learning activity in order for them to remain employed and concurrently improve their career skills for the future. Hence, career development can be positioned as a concept of personal resources, wherein it provides a sense of meaning-making for future direction (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017) and increase one's employability (Mäder & Niessen, 2017). To understand the relationship between career development and adaptive performance in detail, this study attempts to examine the association between career development and adaptive performance.

### **Methodology**

This study employed individuals as the unit of analysis and the data gathered were for a one-off purpose. It was carried out in one of the higher institutions in Malaysia, which houses several of its branches located in the north, east, and west regions. Furthermore, convenience sampling technique was employed for the data collection process, whereby all instruments were selected from the current literature and adapted for their use in the study context. A questionnaire was thus designed in Google Form and then distributed using WhatsApp and email accordingly.

The final amount of questionnaires returned and deemed as usable was 37 for this study. Here, adaptive performance was measured using 19 items via a seven-point Likert scale developed by Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012), which yielded alpha values ranging from 0.70 to 0.91. Meanwhile, measuring readiness to change was conducted using six items via a five-point Likert scale developed by Vakola (2014) having alpha values ranging from 0.65 to 0.80. Lastly, career development measurement was carried out using 21 items via a five-point Likert scale developed by Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, and Blonk (2013), wherein their alpha values ranged from 0.81 to 0.84. Then, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26 was employed to undertake a statistical analysis particularly geared towards identifying the normality of the data collected, as well as generating the reliability and correlational analyses.

### **Results and Data Interpretation**

Based on the findings obtained, 37 respondents participated in this study, wherein the males were represented by 21.6% and the females were represented by 78.4%. In terms of age, 29 respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, 8 respondents were between 41 and 50 years old, and 5

respondents were between 51 and 60 years old. A majority of them held a Master degree (78.4%), while the remaining 21.6% were PhD holders. Furthermore, most of the respondents (46%) had worked for 5 to 10 years, while 38% had worked for 10 to 15 years, 14% , had worked for more than 15 years and the remaining 3% worked less than 5 years. In terms of position, 68% or 25 respondents did not have any managerial duties, whereas the remaining 31% or 12 respondents were holding their respective management post.

Then, a reliability analysis was conducted to identify the internal consistency of the instruments employed in this study in reflecting the research context. Typically, the data obtained are deemed as reliable when all of the factors being assessed yielding values more than 0.80 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978). To this end, the factors of readiness to change, career development, and adaptive performance generated good internal consistency in view of their resulting values: 0.864, 0.961, and 0.924, respectively. The normality test was conducted next via skewness and kurtosis; the value of skewness divided by the standard error (-1.210 / 0.388) yielded -3.12, while the value of kurtosis divided by the standard error (4.91 / 0.759) was 6.5. Both of these results revealed values greater than  $\pm 1.96$  (Mat Roni, 2014), which allowed the conclusion that data in this study were not normally distributed.

Furthermore, since the data in this study were not normally distributed, Spearman's correlation analysis was carried out to measure the association between readiness to change and career development with adaptive performance, wherein both readiness to change and career development were shown to correlate with adaptive performance accordingly. Table 1 displays the strength of the correlation between adaptive performance and readiness to change, which is moderate with an r-value of 0.470 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile, the association between career development and adaptive performance was deemed as low, yielding an r-value of 0.355 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 1: Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Adaptive Performance	5.40	.64	-	
2. Readiness to Change	3.67	.63	.470**	
3. Career Development	4.15	.58	.355*	.374*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ,

### Discussion and Future Research

Adaptive performance is a vital component for all employees across different sectors, thereby reflecting it to be worthwhile for further understanding (Shahidan et al., 2017; Shoss et al., 2020) specifically in the education industry. For this exact intent and purpose, the current study was conducted in order to establish the reliability of adaptive performance's instrument and identify the association between readiness to change and career development with adaptive performance in the context of lecturers employed in one of the higher institutions in Malaysia. To this end, it could be conclusively determined that a good internal consistency was observed for the variables measured in the specific scope of this study, namely adaptive performance, readiness to change, and career development. Furthermore, Spearman's correlation analysis revealed that readiness to change and

career development were both found to be significant and correlated with adaptive performance. Hence, the objectives of this study were successfully achieved.

Members of an organisation must accept any incoming work-based changes and strive to be flexible with their responses. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred the business world to accept the usage of online platforms in any business operations, whereby there is no exception for the education industry. Although online teaching and learning activity is not a new trend, the pandemic has forced stakeholders such as the lecturers and students to adopt the new norm in which all teaching and learning processes happen virtually only. Therefore, a positive response towards the current need for skills at one's workplace can create the behaviour of proactivity or adaptive tendencies (Shoss et al., 2020). When an employee is constantly in the state of readiness, the meaning-making and positive perceptions underlining the necessity for change will drive a positive action. Despite this study having revealed a correlation between readiness to change and adaptive performance, it remains a worthwhile effort for future research works to understand such relationship in more detail.

Following many organisations having positioned career development as one of the main strategies to improve employee performance, many scholars have also perceived this element to be among organisational factors driving an employee's behaviour. However, it is perceived as one of the individual factors wherein self-notion is implied strictly in the context of this study. For example, the sense of self-awareness and concern for their future employment has resulted in an employee's belief that behaving adaptively towards the current work environment change will aid them in improving their career and to remain employable. In consideration of the consistent need to achieve both of the goals, career development undoubtedly can lead to adaptive performance.

Accordingly, this study successfully revealed a significant and positive correlation between career development and adaptive performance. Although Iskandar and Burhan (2018) have also detailed similar relationship, their work is limited to the scope of the manufacturing industry. Henceforth, future research efforts will find it worthwhile to identify whether career development is truly one of the determinants for adaptive performance or otherwise.

Additionally, it is noted that most of the contextual basis for adaptive performance studies is allocated to specific industries, rendering it necessary to acknowledge the need to implement the construct's multi-scale instrument as proposed by Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) for adaptation in terms of Malaysia, specifically its education industry. Hence, the results of the preliminary data collection depicting its good internal consistency can be adopted in the future for an alternative context. This also calls for more analyses (such as regression analysis) to be done in determining and testing the relationship between readiness to change and career development. It is further suggested for future studies to add other independent variables such as motivation in order to delineate their respective relationship with adaptive performance accordingly.

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