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The Influence of Organizational Learning on Work Performance among Academic Staffs in Private Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract

The success or failure of universities are very much dependent on the contribution and involvement of its academics. In fact, in the era of globalization, many universities, may it be public or private learning institutions are not only required to produce quality human capital but also to provide training to the graduates in meeting the market demand. They need to focus on infusing values that are beneficial industrially and to the society at large. Previous studies evident that organizational learning is one of the important aspects of organizational factors that can direct the behavior and attitudes of the employees to improve their work performance. It may act as a catalyst to influence performance of organizations too. In order to remain relevant and competitive, universities need to focus on continuous learning and use of knowledge, which can serve as a critical key to success for facilitating individuals and team in any organizations. However, an overriding question is: to what extent organization learning are observed in most universities in Malaysia? Therefore, this study was intended to investigate the relationship between organizational learning and work performance of the academic staff in higher learning institutions. There were about 122 academic staff from a few selected higher learning intuitions, participated in this study. The result indicated that majority of the academic staff felt that their level of work performance was high, particularly on task and contextual performance. Interestingly, the respondents perceived that their universities practice high level of organizational learning, particularly on the aspects of system perspective and openness and experimentation. The finding also revealed that there was a moderate relationship between organizational learning and work performance. The multiple regression models were successful in indicating that the predictor variable accounted for 9.1% of the explained adjusted variance in work performance. The discussion addresses practical implication and future research direction.

Keywords: Organizational Learning. Work Performance, Tasks, Contextual, Openness, Systematic.

Introduction

The impact of globalization, technological and communication changes have challenged and put pressured to higher learning institutions to adapt to strategic changes so that they could remain relevant and competitive advantages. Apparently, universities are facing not only on producing quality human capital but they are also responsible to provide training to the graduates in meeting the market demand. At the same time, they need to focus on infusing values that are beneficial industrially and to the society at large. Universities, may it be public or private educational institutions have been pressured to increase the quality of services, efficiency and effectiveness in utilization of resources. However, Bently et al (2013) and Elnaga and Imran (2013) asserted that the success or failure of universities are very much dependent on the roles and involvements of its academics. Altbach (2001) noted that academics are facing a variety of challenges and role expectations which may affect the quality of work. Thus, in order for the institutions to sustain and become competitive, their employees need to be trained and re- train. In this sense, Watkins and Marsick (1996) said that learning could improve the intellectual capabilities of the employees; as a result, organizations will ultimately be at the advantage through having learned employees. Ravangard et al (2014) suggested that there are critical needs for the organization to provide continuous learning for their employees. Parallel, Harrim (2010) asserted that work performance could be improved through continuous learning and use of knowledge, which can serve as a critical key to success for facilitating individual and team in an organization.

Literature noted that learning at the organizational level is a prerequisite for successful organizational change and performance (Garvin, 1993; Hendry, 1996). Besides, Nafei et al (2012) claimed that the behavior and attitude of the academicians that much is related to organizational learning is one of the most pertinent organizational factors for university performance. Given this juncture, higher learning institutions should engage in organization learning as learning can produce more opportunities for educators to access the right knowledge at the right time and in the right location to stay competitive (Kumar, 2005). However, given this scenario, to what extent organization learning are observed in most universities in Malaysia? Thus, it is interesting to investigate, to what extent, academics have articulated and embedded organizational learning in their learning system and as a shared culture. Besides, literature found that studies on organizational learning and individual work performance in higher learning institution in Malaysia is still lacking (Norashikin Hussein, 2014) and warrant further investigation. More importantly, this study hopes to enhance and reinforce awareness of the importance of organizational learning in addressing the demands of organizational sustainability. It is pertinent for human resource management to constantly improve and optimize their human resources in meeting the growing competitive pressure. Besides, Dessler, (2011) noted that enhancing employee job performance is pertinent since highly performing employees will be able to support an organization to realize strategic goals and aims.

Literature Review

The Concepts of Work Performance

The constructs of work performance have been extensively researched in the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management (Campbell, 1990). The termed work performance has been linked with employees' ability in realizing their respective work goals, fulfilling expectations and attaining job targets that are set by their organizations (Maathis & Jackson, 2000; Bohlander et al., 2001). Sarmiento and Beale

(2007) argued that job performance as the result of two aspects, specifically, skills of employees to use their skills and abilities to perform a better job. Campbell (1990) defined work performance based on three assumptions: firstly, it is concerned with behavioral aspect of the individual at workplace; secondly, the action or outcome of the performance is associated to organizational goals and thirdly, it is multidimensional. To Campbell (1993), both behavior and outcomes aspects are interrelated. Behavior is subject to what individual are doing while at work and the action itself. On the other hand, the outcome is referred to result of employees' behavior in achieving the goals. Hence, based on these assumptions, Campbell (1990) proposed eight work performance dimensions which includes job-specific task proficiency, non-job-specific task proficiency, written and oral communications, demonstrating effort, maintaining personal discipline, facilitating peer and team performance, supervision, and management and administration. Another researcher, Viswesvaran (1993) come up with ten dimensions to measure work performance, which include productivity, quality of work, job knowledge, effort, leadership, and acceptance of authority, communication, administrative and interpersonal competence.

Nonetheless, according to Sonnentag and Frese (2001) work performance is a multi-dimensional construct. For examples, they reviewed that work of performance is classified into two domains, which are, task and contextual performance. Task performance can be referred to actions that are part of the formal reward systems and it addresses the necessities found in job descriptions. They also mentioned that among the eight performance components proposed by Campbell (1990), there are five factors which refer to task performance which are job-specific task proficiency, non-job-specific task proficiency, written and oral communication proficiency, supervision and management. On the hand hands, contextual performance is behavior that support the organizational technical core functions which include social and psychological environment. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) noted that contextual performance sustains and improves an organization's social network and the psychological climate that supports technical tasks. Apart from task and contextual performance, Viswesvaran and Ones (2008) and Rotundo and Sackett (2002) suggested counterproductive behavior should be considered third broad dimensions of work performance. Counterproductive work behavior is defined as behavior that harms the well-being of the organization (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Such behaviors

include absenteeism, off-task behavior, theft, and substance abuse. Hence, this study utilized Campbell's theory of performance to understand the relationship between performance and learning. Campbell, (1990) hypothesized that the performance components is a function of three performance determinants which are the declarative knowledge, procedural and skills knowledge and motivation. Declarative knowledge includes knowledge about facts, principles, goals and self-knowledge, which represents an understanding of a given tasks requirements. Procedural knowledge and skills that comprised of cognitive, psychomotor, physical, self-management, and interpersonal. In addition, Campbell et al., (1993) noted that motivation is a joined effect from three choice behaviors which are; the choice to perform, the level of effort, and the persistence of the effort. Campbell (1990) claimed that individual abilities, personality and learning experiences are predictors of declarative knowledge and skills. on the other hand, cognitive ability variables can effect on task knowledge, task skills, and task habits (Motowidlo et al. 1997). Having said that, learning has been assumed as source of heterogeneity among organization and a basis for competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). Argote (2011) asserted that individual members are the means through which organizational learning generally take place. The knowledge that individuals obtain would have to be

embedded in a supra individual repository for organizational learning to occur. Literature suggested that paying attention to organizational learning, is one of the most important approach in enhancing work performance and sustainable development, particularly in higher learning institution (Davodi and Oshtori, (2011) and Kuokkanen, et al (2009).

The Concepts of Organizational Learning

Lopez et al (2005) defined organizational learning as an internal forceful and dynamic process which aims to create and enhance organizational knowledge and put together resources capabilities. In addition, Sessa and London (2006) mentioned that organizational learning as a cognitive process is be able to create and enhance new skills, knowledge, and suitable methods used to achieve the goals and promote the organizational performance. The definitions of organizational learning have been suggested by many researchers such as the process of detection and correction of errors (Argyris & Schon, 1978) and also as the process of change in thought and action (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999); developing better actions through knowledge and understanding (Fiol & Lyles, 1985), deliberately use of learning processes to change the organization for betterment (Dixon, 1999).

Nonetheless, research showed that organizational learning has its roots in individual learning (Shrivastava, 1983; Senge, 1990). However, the process that leads to its development is not a straight forward thing, where organizational learning is seen as a dynamic process on knowledge (Huber, 1991; Crossan et al., 1999). The process starts from the knowledge acquisition of the individuals and later develop with the exchange and integration of this knowledge until a body of collective knowledge is created and embedded in the organizational processes and culture (Hedberg, 1981). Consequently,

Aslam, Javaid, Tanveer, Khan and Shabbir (2011) stated that without continuous learning and knowledge acquisition by individuals in organization, the chances to success are deteriorating. On the same note, Gavigan, Ottisch and Mahroum (1999) said that the rapid development on knowledge and technology-based economy in modern businesses have push organizations to get to a higher level of knowledge and skills. Therefore, learning process at all levels include individual, group and organizational could be the best approach among all options. In addition, Bontis et al. (2002) found that there was a positive relationship between organizational learning and work performance at three levels, namely individual, group, and organization.

Jerez-Gómez et al. (2005) define organizational learning as an organization's capability to process knowledge (i.e. create, acquire, transfer and integrate knowledge) and change its behavior to indicate the new cognitive situation, with the idea of enhancing its performance. They ascertain that there are four dimensions in organizational learning namely the manager's commitment to learning, the company's strategic vision, experimentation, and the transfer and integration of knowledge. The first- dimension focus on management's commitment to learning, supports and encourages the acquisition, creation and transfer of knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The second dimension, reflect the organization's systematic vision where it is a key to getting employees to understand that the organization is oriented to learning (Williams, 2001). Having a common idea about the degree to which the organization is oriented to learning is seen as giving meaning and generating identity (McGuill et al., 1992). The third-dimension focus on openness and experimentation where it is the entry of new ideas and perspectives, internal and external, allowing for the constant renewal, extension and improvement of individual knowledge (Slocum et al., 1994). Finally, transfer implies the extension of knowledge acquired individually to other people (McGuill et

al 1992) and integration involves creating organizational memory by means of routines and processes (Huber, 1991). This study adapted Jerez- Gómez et al. (2005) model to understand organizational learning in a higher learning context.

The Relationship between Organizational Learning and Individual Work Performance

Literature indicated that the relationships between organizational learning and work performance have attracted numerous amounts of research. For example, Skerlavaj and Dimovski (2006) in their studies found that organizational learning positively affects performance in business organizations. They concluded that organizations that invest more efforts in achieving higher-level organizational learning could gain in financial and non-financial performance as well. In fact, previous studies have considered organizational learning as an effective organizations strategy for organizational renewal (Spicer and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Azizi (2017) in his study found that there is a positive relationship between organizational learning and its four dimensions namely management commitment, vision systems, open space, and experimentation, transfer and integration of knowledge on organizational performance of

Tehran in insurance firms. Jimenez and Vela (2011) reported in their study that had been carried out on Spanish companies and found that organizational learning has a positive impact on organizational performance and as well as organizational learning affects innovation.

Apart from business organizations, there were also studies conducted to investigate organizational learning and its relationship with performance in a higher learning institution, however, its area is still limited (Nordin et al, 2013). Husein et al (2013) asserted that higher learning institutions are the major contributors in providing educational opportunities for students in Malaysia. Therefore, it is important for higher learning institutions to adapt the learning orientation. In fact, their studies hypothesized that learning organization culture has direct effects on organizational performance and organizational innovativeness, potentially leading to long term organizational success. In another study done by Rose et al (2009) found that organizational learning was found positively related to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work performance among public service managers in Malaysia. Pham and Tran (2016) did a survey on 136 employees from a public university in Hanoi. The targeted respondents were managers, lecturers and researchers having more than a 5-year working experience and their findings indicated that the organizational learning process was positively influenced by employee participation in decision making and significantly associates with the performance of the university. In sum, much of the organizational learning studies have been covered and discussed in the western context and the outcomes on organization always shown positive result. However, scanty study has been conducted in local context and it is claimed that the implementation is still misleading (Ahmad, 2009). Besides, in order for higher learning institutions to remain relevant, hence, it is important to investigate the Malaysian higher education context for the disruptive factors detection and the progress strategies development in order to take cumulative steps towards higher performance of the employees as well as the institutions. Therefore, this study was intended to examine the relationship between organizational learning and work performance in Malaysian higher learning institutions.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are four-folds, namely to determine (a) the level of work performance of the academic staff in private universities in Klang Valley, (b) the level of organizational

learning as perceived by the academic staff (c) the relationship between organizational learning and work performance among academic staff (d) the contribution of each of the significant predictor variables towards work performance.

Methodology

In this study, a cross sectional research design was utilized. A survey method was used to elicit academic staff work performance and perceived organizational learning. The instrument termed as Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) was adapted from Koopmans et. al. (2011) to measure individual work performance. The IWPQ consisted of three dimensions namely task performance, contextual performance and counterproductive work behavior. On the other hand, organizational learning questionnaire was adapted from Gomez et. al. (2005). It measured four dimensions namely managerial commitment, system perspective, openness and experimentation and knowledge transfer and integration. Both the questionnaires are in a form of 7-Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 7. The Cronbach’s alpha test for all the instruments range from 0.74- 0.92, indicating high reliability. There were about 122 academic staff from a few selected private universities in Klang Valley, participated in this study. Multiple regression analysis was used as a tool to identify the contribution of independents variable towards the variance of work performance.

Findings and Discussions

Research Objectives 1: To determine level of work performance among academic staff

Table 1: The Levels of Work Performance of Academic Staff

| Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| Low (1.00 – 2.99) | - | - |
| Moderate (3.00 – 4.99) | 34 | 27.9 |
| High (5.00-7.00) | 88 | 72.1 |
| Total | 122 | 100 |

Table 1 displays the level of work performance among academic staffs in a few private universities in Klang Valley. The findings show 72.1% (88) of respondents felt that their level of performance was high and about 27.9 % (34) perceived that their level of performance were moderate. None perceived that they have low performance. Further analysis was examined on each dimensions of work performance as mentioned in the following table.

Table 2: The Work Performance Dimensions’ for Academic Staff

| Component | Mean | Std Dev | Indicator |
|----------------------------|------|---------|-----------|
| Task Performance | 5.91 | .758 | High |
| Contextual Performance | 5.82 | .673 | High |
| Counterproductive behavior | 4.02 | .859 | Moderate |

Mean score indicator: 1.00 - 2.99 (Low), 3.00 – 4.99 (Moderate) and 5.00 – 7.00 (High)

Table 2 indicates that the respondents perceived they have high level of task performance (mean=5.91, SD= .758) and contextual performance (mean=5.82, SD= .673). Interestingly, the result also indicates that there was a moderate level of counterproductive work behavior (mean=4.02, SD=.859). This result indicates that the academic staff perceived their work performance were high. Task performance is referred as actions, behavior and outcomes that employees engaged in that are linked with organizational goals (Campbell et al, 1993). Hence, in this sense, it can be inferred that the respondents believed that they have fulfilled and achieved their tasks as in their job scope and descriptions. The finding also showed that the respondents perceived that their contextual performance were high. Contextual performance is referred to employees who are able to develop social network and supports technical tasks at workplace (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). It is interesting to note, this study found that he academic staff perceived their counterproductive behavior was moderate. In other word, the respondents felt they moderately involved in behavior that could harm the wellbeing of the organization and such behavior include lateness or tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover.

Research Objective 2: To identify level of Organizational Learning among academic staff

Table 3: The Levels of Organizational Learning among Academic Staff

| Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| Low (1.00 – 2.99) | 3 | 2.5 |
| Moderate (3.00 – 4.99) | 53 | 43.4 |
| High (5.00 - 7.00) | 66 | 54.1 |
| Total | 122 | 100 |

Table 3 displays the level of organizational learning among academic staffs in private universities in Klang Valley. The finding shows that about 54.1% (66) of the respondents perceived that their universities practiced high level of organizational learning. On the other hand, about 43.4% (53) of the respondents perceived a moderate level of organizational learning. Thus, only of 2.5% (3) perceived that their universities practiced low level of organizational learning. Further analysis was also conducted to examine mean and standard deviation scores for each dimension in organizational learning domain as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The organizational learning dimensions' mean scores

| Component | Mean | Std Dev | Indicator |
|-----------------------|------|---------|-----------|
| System Perspective | 5.33 | 1.073 | High |
| Openness | 5.00 | 1.021 | High |
| Managerial Commitment | 4.80 | .848 | Moderate |
| Knowledge Transfer | 4.46 | .896 | Moderate |

Mean score indicator: 1.00 - 2.99 (Low), 3.00 – 4.99 (Moderate) and 5.00 – 7.00 (High)

Table 4 displays the mean and standard deviation scores of the four dimensions of organizational learning. The mean scores are arranged in descending order and the result shows that the mean scores of all the four components range from 5.33 to 4.46, which indicates that the scores are between high to moderate. The result also indicates that system perspective mean score (mean=5.33,

SD=1.073) and openness (mean= 5.00, SD=1.085) indicated highest mean score. On the other hand, managerial commitment (mean= 4.80, SD= 0.848) and knowledge transfer (mean= 4.46, SD= 0.896) indicate moderate mean scores. This study suggests that the respondents perceived their universities somehow portray a high-level organizational learning in generating, acquiring, disseminating and integrating information or knowledge and allows the organization to learn. In this sense, the respondents perceived that the universities have high capability towards system perspective and openness. According to Jerez- Gomez et al (2005), system perspective involves bringing the organization's members together around a common identity and openness is referred as the extent of relationships with the external environment and a climate of openness that encourages the new ideas and points of views.

Research Objective 3: To identify the relationship between Organizational Learning and work performance among academic staff.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix on the relationship on organizational learning on work performance

| Variables | Pearson correlation | P value |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Overall organizational learning | .303 | .001 |
| Managerial commitment | .289 | .001 |
| System perspective | .283 | .002 |
| Openness and experimentation | .201 | .026 |
| Knowledge Transfer | .238 | .008 |

Based on table 3, the finding showed that there was a moderate and positive relationship between overall organizational learning and work performance where $r=.303$, $p=.001$. Further analysis was conducted on each dimension of Organizational Learning and the results showed that all the dimension was having a low and positive relationship where managerial commitment ($r=.289$, $p=.001$), system perspective ($r=.283$, $p=.002$), openness and experimentation ($r=.201$, $p=.026$) and knowledge transfer and integration indicated $r=.238$, $p=.008$.

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Research Objectives 4: To identify which predictors variables contributes significant to the variance work performance.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis on Work Performance

| Variables | Unstd Coefficien t (B) | Std Coefficie nt (β) | t | p | Collinearity Tolerance | Statistic VIF |
|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Constant | 4.077 | | 13.356 | 0.000 | | |
| Managerial commit | 0.141 | 0.220 | 2.012 | 0.047 | .624 | 1.602 |
| System perspective | 0.132 | 0.262 | 2.123 | 0.036 | 0.490 | 2.041 |
| Openness | -0.076 | -0.144 | -0.964 | 0.337 | 0.337 | 2.971 |
| Knowledge transfer | 0.035 | 0.064 | 0.467 | 0.641 | 0.405 | 2.469 |

F-statistic = 4.147, sig. <0.00, R2 = 0.124, Adjusted R2 = 0.094

Based on table 5, the finding depicts that, out of four dimensions of organizational learning that were regressed, two predictors were found to be significant. The two predictor variables were managerial commitment and system perspective with their respective t and p values (t = 2.012, p = 0.047, t = 2.123, p = 0.036). However, openness with t = -0.964, p = 0.337 and knowledge transfer where t = 0.467, p = 0.641 were excluded because it did not contribute in significance to the variance of work performance. Besides, as shown in Table 5, the total amount of variance of the criterion variable that was predictable from the two predictors was 12.4%, and the adjusted R square change of 9.4%. Since the adjusted R square could give a better estimation of the true population value, the contribution of the predictor variables towards the variance in the criterion variable in this study was reported based on the adjusted R-square value. Therefore, the overall regression model was successful in explaining approximately 9.4% of the adjusted variance in work performance.

Conclusions

The main aims of this study were to examine whether organizational learning could influence work performances of the academic staff in selected private higher learning institutions. The findings can be concluded that firstly, the academic staff perceived that their work performance were high in terms of tasks and contextual performance. In this sense, they perceived that they have the ability, skills and knowledge to their respective work aims, then meet their expectations and accomplish the university goals. The academic staff believed that they are able to accomplish their technical and contextual tasks given to them such as teaching and learning, research, community engagement and they also believed that they are to acquire the skills and knowledge needed as an educationist or academics. Thus, high performer's staff can contribute significantly to their workgroups and the organizations. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note, this study found that the academic staff perceived their counterproductive behavior was moderate. In other word, the respondents felt they moderately involved in behavior that could harm the wellbeing of the organization and such behavior include lateness or tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover. Hence, it is pertinent for management of the faculty and university to rectify the issues and come up with corrective program for the staff. Mazni Alias and Roziah Mohd. Rasdi (2015) suggest that an ethical program can be implemented by administrators to assist employees to lessen this destructive behavior. More importantly a transparent policy to restrain workplace deviance should be established at all levels of employees.

Secondly, the finding depicted that the level of organizational learning among academics of higher educational institutions of Malaysia was perceived as high. This study supports the research done by Azizi (2010); Hishamudin Md. Som et al (2010) In this sense, according to Zollo et al (2012) organizational learning is reflected where the organization members are engaged in active knowledge interpretation, that include individual and team knowledge into explicit form such as work manuals, standard operating procedures, or decision support systems or expert system. With regards to the organizational learning dimensions, the findings showed that the respondents' viewed openness and experimentation as high indicating the universities were having positive attitude towards promoting a climate of openness for collective opinions and experiences. The result also in line with what Yukl (2009) described on fundamental key of organizational learning that is collective learning by members of organization. In addition, the dimension of organizational, i.e. system perspective was also perceived as high. Hult and Ferrell (1997) stated that system perspective dealt with the efforts by employees in enhancing their performance towards achieving the organizations' goals.

Thirdly, the result depicted that organizational learning and its dimensions showed positive and low relationship on work performance. This study suggests that the attributes found in organizational learning which include continuous learning, dialogue and inquiry, team learning, embedded system, system connections, and empowerment are all important factors that can improve work performance or employees. The results may help to increase understanding on the concept and about organizational learning theory in higher education setting. Milway and Saxton (2011) concurred that enhancing organizational knowledge and interpreting that knowledge on a daily practice can be a great implement for increasing an organization's performance, in particular when the practices are developed. Lastly, it is interesting to note that two dimensions of organizational learning that are, system perspectives and openness and experimentation display major contribute major in work performances.

Based on the findings, the study has several practical implications. Firstly, the indication of having high performance of academic staff may lead to the realization of the broad objectives for which universities are established, namely knowledge delivery, research and community services. Many scholars had confirmed that high and effective performance in higher education will lead to positive growth (Blanchard, 2004). Given this point, leaders play important roles to enhance their employees' capabilities to go beyond the prescribed requirements and thus enhancing extra actions that will result in achieving valuable outcomes. Leaders and human resource management can direct human resources toward the strategic objectives of the organization and ensure that organizational functions are aligned with the internal as well as external environment (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). Secondly, the result also shows that academic staff perceived that the organizational learning is high and also a significant contributor to the variance of work performance. Hence, this study seeks to contribute to management practices by considering the important of organizational learning processes that could influence work performance of the employees. Therefore, this finding has practical implications of the leaders and administrators of the university to provide effective infrastructure in accommodating organizational learning at workplace. For example, ICT such as intranet, virtual learning, moot learning and many more are integrated into the university system to disseminate information, reward systems and strong leadership can support organizational learning efforts. University should also be given the motivation and incentives to become active learning organizations and promote learning activities at the organizational level to enhance the quality of

teaching and doing research and developing sustainability. Besides, universities should encourage their staff to inculcate a learning culture so as to enhance knowledge, skills and attitude in order to fulfill organization goals and aspirations.

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