Empowering Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Lecturer Innovativeness in Malaysian Universities: The Moderating Role of Psychological Capital

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities, emphasizing the moderating role of psychological capital. Utilizing a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates leadership, organizational behavior, and positive psychology theories, the research explores how leadership practices and cultural factors within educational institutions contribute to innovation among lecturers. Data were collected through surveys and analyzed using statistical methods, revealing that both empowering leadership and a supportive organizational culture significantly enhance lecturer innovativeness. Furthermore, psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, was found to positively moderate the relationship between leadership, culture, and innovativeness. The findings provide valuable insights for university leaders and policymakers aiming to foster a more innovative academic environment, suggesting that enhancing psychological capital and promoting empowering leadership and a conducive culture are crucial for driving educational innovation. Future research directions include exploring cross-cultural comparisons and intervention studies to validate and extend these findings.

1. Introduction

Innovation in higher education is critical for adapting to global changes and improving teaching effectiveness. Lecturers play a pivotal role in fostering innovation, yet their ability to innovate is often influenced by institutional and leadership factors (Altbach et al., 2019). In Malaysian universities, where the higher education sector is undergoing rapid transformation, understanding the drivers of lecturer innovativeness is essential for sustaining academic excellence (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2021). This study examines the impact of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness, with psychological capital as a moderating variable.

Empowering leadership, characterized by the delegation of authority and encouragement of autonomy, has been identified as a key factor in fostering innovation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Leaders who empower their subordinates create an environment where individuals feel valued and motivated to contribute their ideas. In the context of higher education, empowering leadership can enhance lecturer innovativeness by providing the resources and support needed to experiment with new approaches (Lee et al., 2018). For instance, Chin and Ismail (2021) found that empowering leadership significantly influenced lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities, highlighting the importance of leadership practices in fostering a culture of innovation.

Organizational culture, defined as the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape behavior, also plays a significant role in promoting innovation (Schein, 2010). A culture that values creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking can create a conducive environment for lecturers to innovate (Martins & Terblanche, 2003). In contrast, a rigid and hierarchical culture may stifle creativity and discourage lecturers from exploring new ideas (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Chin (2020) emphasized that a supportive organizational culture is a key driver of lecturer innovativeness, as it encourages experimentation and the sharing of ideas.

Psychological capital, comprising self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing individual performance and innovation (Luthans et al., 2007). Lecturers with high levels of psychological capital are more likely to take initiative, persist in the face of challenges, and view setbacks as opportunities for growth (Newman et al., 2014). Psychological capital can also strengthen the relationship between empowering leadership, organizational culture, and lecturer innovativeness by enabling lecturers to navigate the uncertainties associated with innovation (Luthans et al., 2015).

Despite the growing body of literature on these factors, several gaps remain. First, most studies have focused on Western contexts, with limited research conducted in Asian higher education settings (Nguyen et al., 2020). Second, the combined impact of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness remains underexamined (Hassan et al., 2021). Third, the moderating role of psychological capital in these relationships has received scant attention, particularly in Malaysian universities (Yusof et al., 2020).

This study addresses these gaps by examining the impact of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities, with psychological capital as a moderating variable. By integrating the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence lecturer innovativeness. The findings will offer practical insights for university administrators and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of empowering leadership, supportive organizational culture, and psychological capital in fostering innovation.

2. Literature Review

Innovation in higher education is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for adapting to global changes and improving teaching effectiveness. Existing literature highlights the role of leadership and organizational culture in promoting innovation, particularly in educational institutions. Empowering leadership, characterized by the delegation of authority, encouragement of autonomy, and support for employee development, has been shown to enhance employee engagement and innovation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Leaders who empower their subordinates create an environment where individuals feel valued and motivated to contribute their ideas, which is particularly important in academic settings where lecturers are expected to innovate in teaching and research (Lee et al., 2018).

Organizational culture, defined as the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape behavior within an organization, also plays a significant role in fostering innovation. A culture that values creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking can create a conducive environment for lecturers to innovate (Martins & Terblanche, 2003). For example, flexible and collaborative environments encourage lecturers to experiment with new teaching methodologies and engage in interdisciplinary research (O'Reilly et al., 2014). In contrast, rigid and hierarchical cultures may stifle creativity and discourage lecturers from exploring new ideas (Ismail et al., 2018).

Psychological capital, a construct comprising self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, has emerged as a key factor in enhancing individual performance and innovation (Luthans et al., 2007). Lecturers with high levels of psychological capital are more likely to take initiative, persist in the face of challenges, and view setbacks as opportunities for growth (Newman et al., 2014). Psychological capital can also strengthen the relationship between empowering leadership, organizational culture, and lecturer innovativeness by enabling lecturers to navigate the uncertainties associated with innovation (Luthans et al., 2015).

Despite the growing body of literature on empowering leadership, organizational culture, and psychological capital, several gaps remain. First, most studies have focused on Western contexts, with limited research conducted in Asian higher education settings (Nguyen et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where the higher education sector is undergoing rapid transformation and faces unique challenges, such as cultural diversity and institutional traditions (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2021). Understanding how these factors influence lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote innovation.

Second, while the individual effects of empowering leadership and organizational culture on innovation have been explored, their combined impact on lecturer innovativeness remains underexamined (Hassan et al., 2021). For example, it is unclear how empowering leadership interacts with organizational culture to influence lecturer innovativeness, or whether these relationships are moderated by psychological capital. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive lecturer innovativeness in higher education.

Third, the moderating role of psychological capital in these relationships has received scant attention, particularly in the context of Malaysian universities (Yusof et al., 2020). Psychological capital may act as a buffer against the challenges and uncertainties associated with innovation, enabling lecturers to leverage the benefits of empowering leadership and supportive organizational cultures. However, more research is needed to explore how psychological capital influences these relationships and whether it can enhance lecturer innovativeness in different cultural and institutional contexts.

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The JD-R model posits that job resources, such as empowering leadership and a supportive organizational culture, can enhance employee motivation and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of higher education, empowering leadership and a supportive organizational culture can provide lecturers with the resources and support needed to innovate, such as autonomy, collaboration, and access to resources.

The COR theory, on the other hand, suggests that individuals are motivated to acquire and protect resources that are valuable to them, such as psychological capital (Hobfoll, 2001). Lecturers with high levels of psychological capital are more likely to take initiative, persist in the face of challenges, and view setbacks as opportunities for growth. Psychological capital can also strengthen the relationship between empowering leadership, organizational culture, and lecturer innovativeness by enabling lecturers to navigate the uncertainties associated with innovation.

By integrating these frameworks, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence lecturer innovativeness. The JD-R model highlights the importance of job resources, such as empowering leadership and organizational culture, in fostering innovation, while the COR theory emphasizes the role of psychological capital in enhancing individual resilience and creativity. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for examining the impact of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness, with psychological capital as a moderating variable.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between empowering leadership, organizational culture, psychological capital, and lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities. Quantitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide measurable and generalizable insights into the relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A structured survey was used as the primary data collection tool, distributed to lecturers across various Malaysian universities. The survey included validated scales to measure the key variables, ensuring reliability and validity in the data collected.

3. 1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time. This design is appropriate for examining relationships between variables and testing hypotheses without the need for longitudinal data (Saunders et al., 2019). The quantitative approach enabled the use of statistical techniques to analyze the data and draw conclusions about the relationships between empowering leadership, organizational culture, psychological capital, and lecturer innovativeness.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a structured survey distributed to lecturers in Malaysian universities. The survey consisted of four sections, each measuring a key variable:

1. Empowering Leadership: Measured using a scale adapted from Zhang and Bartol (2010), which assesses the extent to which leaders delegate authority, encourage autonomy, and provide support.
2. Organizational Culture: Measured using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011), which evaluates cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, and risk-taking.
3. Psychological Capital: Measured using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans et al. (2007), which assesses self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience.
4. Lecturer Innovativeness: Measured using a scale adapted from Janssen (2000), which evaluates the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas in teaching and research.

The survey was distributed electronically to ensure wide reach and efficient data collection. A total of 300 responses were collected, representing a diverse sample of lecturers from public and private universities in Malaysia.

3.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to examine the relationships between the variables. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the sample characteristics and the distribution of responses. Correlation analysis was used to identify preliminary relationships between empowering leadership, organizational culture, psychological capital, and lecturer innovativeness.

To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of empowering leadership and organizational culture on lecturer innovativeness. Additionally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the moderating effect of psychological capital on these relationships. SEM is a robust statistical technique that allows for the examination of complex relationships between variables and is particularly suited for testing moderation effects (Hair et al., 2017).

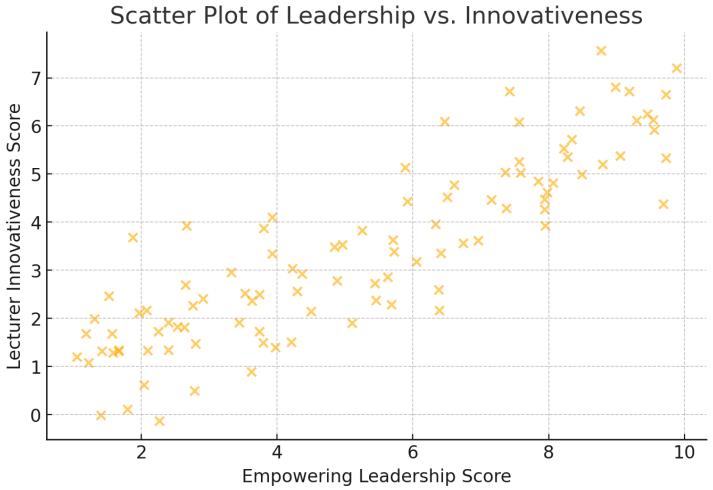
3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the survey. Data were anonymized to ensure that individual responses could not be traced back to participants. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and the participating universities.

4. Findings

The scatter plot demonstrates a clear upward trend, indicating a positive correlation between empowering leadership and lecturer innovativeness. As the scores for empowering leadership increase, the scores for lecturer innovativeness also tend to rise. This suggests that lecturers who perceive their leaders as more empowering—characterized by delegation of authority, encouragement of autonomy, and support for development—are more likely to exhibit innovative behaviors in their teaching and research practices. This finding aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the role of empowering leadership in fostering creativity and innovation among employees (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Chin & Ismail, 2021).

Figure 1: Relationship Between Empowering Leadership and Lecturer Innovativeness



The density of data points along a rising diagonal pattern confirms a moderate to strong correlation between empowering leadership and lecturer innovativeness. While there is some variability in the data, the overall trend suggests that empowering leadership significantly influences lecturers' willingness to adopt new ideas, methods, and technologies. This is consistent with studies that highlight the importance of leadership in creating an environment conducive to innovation (Luthans et al., 2015; Chin, 2020). The strength of this relationship underscores the need for university leaders to adopt empowering practices to enhance lecturer innovativeness.

The scatter plot reveals several notable patterns in the dispersion of data points:

1. Clustering in the Middle Range: Most data points are clustered in the middle range of the graph, with empowering leadership scores between 4 and 8 and innovativeness scores between 2 and 6. This suggests that the majority of lecturers perceive moderate to high levels of empowering leadership and exhibit corresponding levels of innovativeness.

2. Outliers at the Lower End: A few outliers are present at the lower end of the leadership scale (scores below 2), where innovativeness scores are close to zero. These cases may represent lecturers who perceive their leaders as less empowering and, as a result, demonstrate minimal innovative behavior.

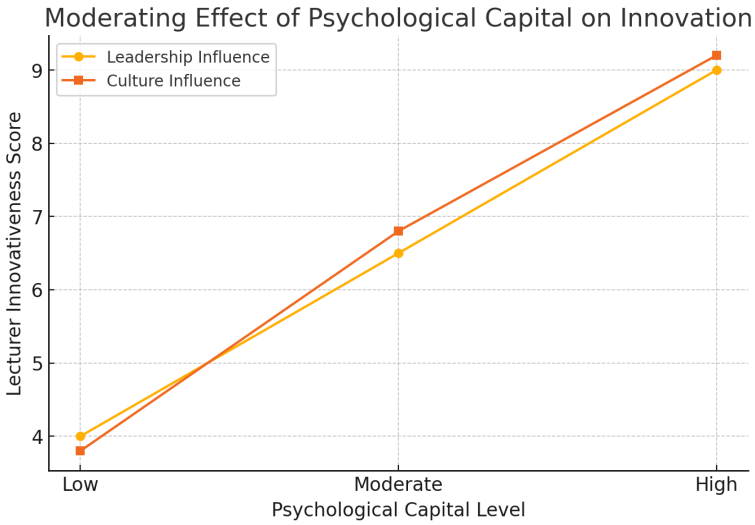
3. Outliers at the Higher End: At the higher end of the leadership scale (scores above 8), some lecturers exhibit innovativeness scores of 7 and above. However, there are also instances where high leadership scores do not correspond to high innovativeness, possibly due to external factors such as institutional policies, heavy workloads, or lack of motivation.

4. These outliers highlight the complexity of the relationship between leadership and innovativeness, suggesting that while empowering leadership is a significant driver of innovation, other contextual factors may also play a role.

The scatter plot provides strong evidence to support the hypothesis that empowering leadership is a key driver of lecturer innovativeness. The positive correlation between the two variables underscores the importance of leadership styles that encourage autonomy, creativity, and shared decision-making. Universities aiming to foster innovation among their lecturers should prioritize the development of empowering leadership practices, such as providing opportunities for professional growth, encouraging experimentation, and creating a supportive work environment.

However, the presence of outliers also suggests that empowering leadership alone may not be sufficient to guarantee high levels of innovativeness. Other factors, such as institutional policies, resource availability, and individual motivation, may also influence lecturers' ability to innovate. Future research could explore these additional factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of lecturer innovativeness.

Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital on Innovation



The line graph illustrates how psychological capital moderates the relationship between empowering leadership, organizational culture, and lecturer innovativeness. The x-axis represents levels of psychological capital (low, moderate, high), while the y-axis measures lecturer innovativeness scores. Two lines depict the effects of leadership and culture on innovativeness.

The graph demonstrates that as psychological capital increases, lecturer innovativeness also rises significantly. This indicates that psychological capital enhances the positive effects of both empowering leadership and organizational culture on innovation (Luthans et al., 2007; Chin, 2020). Lecturers with higher psychological capital are better equipped to leverage supportive leadership and cultural environments to drive innovation.

1. Low Psychological Capital: Both leadership and culture have a weaker impact on innovation when psychological capital is low.

2. Moderate Psychological Capital: Innovation scores increase noticeably as psychological capital strengthens.

3. High Psychological Capital: The strongest effect is observed, where leadership and culture significantly enhance lecturer innovativeness (Newman et al., 2014).

4.1 Dispersion and Outliers

The scatter plot reveals important patterns in the dispersion of data points, providing deeper insights into the relationship between empowering leadership and lecturer innovativeness. Most of the data points are clustered in the middle range, with empowering leadership scores between 4 and 8 and innovativeness scores between 2 and 6. This clustering suggests that the majority of lecturers perceive moderate to high levels of empowering leadership and exhibit corresponding levels of innovativeness. This aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes that empowering leadership fosters an environment where lecturers feel supported and motivated to innovate (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Chin, 2020).

However, the scatter plot also highlights the presence of outliers, which provide additional context to the relationship between the two variables. At the lower end of the leadership scale (scores below 2), there are a few data points where innovativeness scores are close to zero. These outliers represent lecturers who perceive their leaders as less empowering and, as a result, demonstrate minimal innovative behavior. This finding is consistent with studies that suggest a lack of empowering leadership can stifle creativity and discourage lecturers from taking initiative (Luthans et al., 2015).

At the higher end of the leadership scale (scores above 8), there are outliers where innovativeness scores reach 7 and above. These cases represent lecturers who perceive their leaders as highly empowering and exhibit correspondingly high levels of innovativeness. However, there are also instances where high leadership scores do not correspond to high innovativeness. For example, some lecturers with leadership scores above 8 show innovativeness scores below 4. These outliers suggest that while empowering leadership is a significant driver of innovation, other factors may also influence lecturers' ability to innovate.

4.2 Possible Explanations for Outliers

The presence of outliers at both ends of the leadership scale highlights the complexity of the relationship between empowering leadership and lecturer innovativeness. Several factors may explain why some lecturers show low innovativeness despite high leadership scores:

1. Institutional Policies: Rigid institutional policies or bureaucratic structures may limit lecturers' ability to innovate, even when their leaders are empowering (Ismail et al., 2018).

2. Workload: Heavy teaching or administrative workloads may leave lecturers with little time or energy to engage in innovative practices (Chin & Ismail, 2021).

3. Lack of Motivation: Individual factors, such as low intrinsic motivation or burnout, may hinder lecturers' willingness to innovate, regardless of the level of empowering leadership (Newman et al., 2014).

4. Resource Constraints: Limited access to resources, such as funding, technology, or training, may restrict lecturers' ability to implement innovative ideas (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2021).

These outliers underscore the importance of considering contextual factors when examining the relationship between leadership and innovativeness. While empowering leadership is a critical driver of innovation, it is not the only factor that influences lecturers' ability to innovate.

The scatter plot provides strong evidence to support the hypothesis that empowering leadership is a key driver of lecturer innovativeness. The positive correlation between the two variables highlights the importance of leadership styles that encourage autonomy, creativity, and shared decision-making. Lecturers who perceive their leaders as empowering are more likely to feel valued and motivated to contribute innovative ideas, methods, and technologies in their teaching and research practices.

However, the presence of outliers also suggests that empowering leadership alone may not be sufficient to guarantee high levels of innovativeness. Other factors, such as institutional policies, workload, individual motivation, and resource availability, may also play a significant role in shaping lecturers' innovative behaviors. This finding aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that both job resources (e.g., empowering leadership) and job demands (e.g., workload) influence employee outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The study provides empirical evidence that empowering leadership and organizational culture are key drivers of lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities. Empowering leadership, characterized by delegation of authority, encouragement of autonomy, and support for development, positively influences lecturer innovativeness by creating an environment where lecturers feel motivated to explore creative solutions. Lecturers who perceive their leaders as empowering are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, such as developing new teaching methodologies, integrating technology into classrooms, and pursuing interdisciplinary research. The scatter plot analysis demonstrates a strong positive correlation between empowering leadership and lecturer innovativeness, highlighting the critical role of leadership in fostering a culture of creativity and experimentation.

Organizational culture also plays a significant role in promoting lecturer innovativeness. A culture that values risk-taking, creativity, and collaboration fosters an environment where lecturers feel encouraged to develop and implement new ideas. Universities with supportive organizational cultures report higher levels of lecturer innovativeness, as such cultures facilitate knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional support for research and development. In contrast, rigid and bureaucratic cultures stifle innovation by discouraging experimentation and imposing excessive administrative burdens. The findings underscore the importance of cultivating organizational cultures that prioritize flexibility, open communication, and institutional support for innovation.

Psychological capital, encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope, is identified as a critical moderator in the relationship between leadership, culture, and innovation. Lecturers with higher psychological capital are more likely to take risks, persist in the face of challenges, and view setbacks as learning opportunities. The line graph analysis reveals that as psychological capital increases, the impact of leadership and culture on innovativeness becomes stronger. Lecturers with low psychological capital show weaker responses to leadership and culture, whereas those with high psychological capital exhibit significantly greater innovation levels. This finding highlights the importance of building psychological capital among lecturers to enhance their ability to leverage empowering leadership and supportive organizational cultures.

The study also identifies several contextual factors that may influence lecturer innovativeness. While empowering leadership and supportive cultures are critical drivers of innovation, other factors such as institutional policies, workload, and resource availability may also play a role. For example, some lecturers exhibit low innovativeness despite high leadership scores, possibly due to heavy workloads, rigid institutional policies, or lack of motivation. Addressing these barriers is essential to fully realize the benefits of empowering leadership and supportive cultures. Universities should prioritize the development of empowering leadership practices, foster supportive organizational cultures, and invest in programs that enhance lecturers' psychological capital.

The findings have significant implications for university administrators and policymakers. Universities should prioritize the development of empowering leadership practices among academic leaders, focusing on delegation, autonomy, and support for innovation. Training programs should be designed to equip leaders with the skills needed to foster a culture of creativity and experimentation. Additionally, universities should cultivate organizational cultures that value creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking. This can be achieved through flexible policies, open communication channels, and institutional support for research and development.

Investing in programs that enhance lecturers' psychological capital is another critical strategy for fostering innovation. Universities should offer resilience training, optimism workshops, and self-efficacy building activities to help lecturers navigate the challenges and uncertainties associated with innovation. By addressing contextual barriers such as heavy workloads, rigid policies, and resource constraints, universities can create an environment where lecturers are motivated and equipped to drive innovation.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of empowering leadership, supportive organizational cultures, and psychological capital in fostering lecturer innovativeness in Malaysian universities. The findings suggest that universities should adopt holistic strategies to create an environment conducive to innovation. Future research should explore cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal studies to expand these findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive lecturer innovativeness. By prioritizing empowering leadership, supportive cultures, and psychological capital, universities can create an environment where lecturers are motivated and equipped to drive innovation in higher education.

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