



**IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCE
AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ACADEMICIANS**

By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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December 2023

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the unwavering pillars of support in my life, without whom this journey would not have been possible.

To my beloved husband, your continuous support, boundless love, unwavering belief in my abilities, and the chance you provided for me to pursue my studies have been the driving forces behind my academic pursuit. Your encouragement and understanding sustained me through the long hours of research and countless moments of doubt. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine, and I am eternally grateful for your presence in my life.

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This thesis is a testament to the love, faith, and support of these remarkable individuals who have stood by me every step of the way. It is with heartfelt gratitude that I dedicate this work to my husband and family as a token of my deep appreciation for their unwavering support and belief in my academic pursuits.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCE AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ACADEMICIANS

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This study delves into the relationship between leadership styles and innovative performance, focusing on the higher education sector in Malaysia. While there is extensive literature on how leadership styles affect innovative performance, there is a lack of evidence linking inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles to innovative performance in Malaysian public universities. Addressing this gap, the study investigates the effects of inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles on innovative performance among academicians at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) located in east-coast Malaysia. Additionally, it examines the mediating effect of innovative work behavior and the moderating effect of work experience on these relationships. Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS), the study analyzes data from 300 sample sizes of academicians.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that while the direct effects of inclusive and ambidextrous leadership on innovative performance are not significant, introducing innovative work behavior as a mediator makes these relationships significant. Notably, the impact of both leadership styles is more pronounced when employees exhibit high levels of innovative work behavior. Furthermore, the study showed that innovative work behavior on innovative performance is more pronounced among academic staff with more than 10 years of work experience. Besides, the study also shows that the adopted leadership style by academic leaders significantly predicts innovative work behavior and subsequently encourages academic staff's innovative performance. The implications of this study highlight the importance of understanding innovative work behavior at the individual level and its effect on innovative performance. Leaders are encouraged to integrate both inclusive and ambidextrous leadership practices to enhance innovative performance. This study makes several

significant contributions to understanding employee innovative performance. It addresses a gap in the literature by examining how inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles affect innovative performance in Malaysian public universities, specifically UMT and UniSZA. Future research should focus on identifying specific practices that most effectively foster innovative performance and explore contingency factors influencing the connection between inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, and innovative performance.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Ambidextrous Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior, Innovative Performance, Higher Education

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education, GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure



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Kajian ini menyelami hubungan antara gaya kepimpinan dan prestasi inovatif, dengan fokus kepada sektor pendidikan tinggi di Malaysia. Walaupun terdapat kajian yang meluas tentang bagaimana gaya kepimpinan mempengaruhi prestasi inovatif, terdapat kekurangan bukti yang menghubungkan kepimpinan inklusif dan *ambidextrous* dengan prestasi inovatif di universiti-universiti awam Malaysia. Kekurangan tersebut memberikan ruang kepada penyelidik untuk untuk membuat kajian tentang kesan gaya kepimpinan inklusif dan gaya kepimpinan *ambidextrous* ke atas prestasi inovatif pekerja, khususnya dalam kalangan ahli akademik di Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) dan Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) yang terletak di pantai timur semenanjung Malaysia. Sebagai tambahan, kajian ini juga melihat kesan pengantara tingkah laku pekerja inovatif dan hubungannya dengan kedua-dua gaya kepimpinan ini. Teknik kuantitatif digunakan dalam kajian ini dan aplikasi Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) dan Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Seramai 300 orang tenaga pengajar dari Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) dan Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) telah dijadikan sampel dalam kajian ini.

Menariknya, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa walaupun kesan langsung kepimpinan inklusif dan *ambidextrous* terhadap prestasi inovatif tidak signifikan, pengenalan tingkah laku kerja inovatif sebagai perantara membuatkan hubungan ini signifikan. Lebih menarik lagi, kesan positif gaya kepimpinan inklusif, gaya kepimpinan *ambidextrous* lebih terserlah apabila tingkah laku pekerja inovatif berada pada tahap yang tinggi. Selain itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan tingkah laku kerja inovatif ke atas prestasi inovatif pekerja lebih terserlah di kalangan akademik staf yang mempunyai pengalaman kerja lebih dari 10 tahun. Kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa gaya kepimpinan yang diterima secara signifikan meramalkan tingkah laku kerja inovatif. Implikasi kajian ini menekankan kepentingan memahami tingkah laku kerja inovatif pada peringkat

individu dan kesan terhadap prestasi inovatif. Oleh yang demikian, pemimpin digalakkan untuk mengintegrasikan amalan kepimpinan inklusif dan *ambidextrous* untuk meningkatkan prestasi inovatif. Kajian ini memberikan beberapa sumbangan penting untuk memahami prestasi inovatif pekerja. Ia menangani jurang dalam literatur dengan mengkaji bagaimana gaya kepimpinan inklusif dan *ambidextrous* mempengaruhi prestasi inovatif di universiti awam Malaysia, khususnya UMT dan UniSZA. Kajian pada masa akan datang boleh dilakukan untuk meneroka amalan yang relevan dengan prestasi inovatif pekerja dan hubungannya dengan faktor luar jangkaan yang mempunyai kaitan dengan gaya kepimpinan inklusif, gaya kepimpinan *ambidextrous* dan prestasi inovatif pekerja.

Kata Kunci: Kepimpinan Inklusif, Kepimpinan Ambidextrous, Tingkah Laku Kerja Inovatif, Prestasi Inovatif, Pendidikan Tinggi

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Pendidikan Berkualiti, MATLAMAT 8: Pekerjaan yang Baik dan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi, MATLAMAT 8: Industri, Inovasi, dan Infrastruktur

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CR	Composite Reliability
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
IWB	Innovative Work Experience
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SET	Social Exchange Theory
UMT	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu
UNISZA	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
WE	Work Experience

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Employees serve as vital and irreplaceable stakeholders, providing essential organizational support and acting as their backbone (Wei, Nan, & Wei, 2020). Every individual within an organization contributes significantly to their duties, working collectively to attain its aims and objectives (Andreas, 2022). Organizations must retain their employees, as their skills, experience, and ability to maintain productivity are essential for enhancing overall performance (A. B. Santoso & Oktavia, 2023).

However, modern institutions function within a rapidly changing economic environment marked by fierce rivalry and unforeseeable technological progress, which also applies to the higher education sector (Wibowo et al., 2020). Consequently, academic institutions, like other businesses, must enhance their capabilities and respond to these challenges by improving performance (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2020). This involves implementing various policies, strategies, and actions to support and retain dedicated employees while also adapting to the changing requirements of the knowledge-based economy (Ibus, Wahab, & Ismail, 2020). Numerous studies have emphasized the significance of innovative human capital in driving organizational performance (Hameed, Nisar, & Wu, 2021; A. Sarwar et al., 2019). However, this perspective has been largely overlooked and undervalued in highly competitive and demanding environments such as the higher education sector (Fuad, Musa, & Hashim, 2020; Khalip Musa, Kin, Jamal Yunus, Suriani Abdul Hamid, & Sedhu, 2020).

Additionally, previous research has consistently highlighted the critical role of innovation as a fundamental prerequisite for the success and survival of modern organizations (Castaneda & Cuellar, 2020; Ullah, Mirza, Kashif, & Abbas, 2019). Failure to address innovation constraints can leave businesses lagging behind competitors (Yun, Zhao, Jung, & Yigitcanlar, 2020). Organizational success relies on a continuous innovation process, with studies emphasizing the indispensable nature of innovative performance by human capital for achieving operational excellence (Božič & Dimovski, 2019). Whether on an individual or organizational scale, innovation is essential for achieving business success and driving the progress of organizational advancements (Alblooshi, Shamsuzzaman, & Haridy, 2021; Azeem, Ahmed, Haider, & Sajjad, 2021).

Human resources have been recognized as significant in driving innovation implementation (Al-Swidi, Gelaidan, & Saleh, 2021). Gaining insights into employees' innovative processes is paramount for modern enterprises' continued success and expansion, as they introduce novel concepts and fresh opportunities to the organizations (Audenaert et al., 2018; Hameed et al., 2021).

Employees' innovative performance introduces novel facets to organizations and ultimately evolves into the organization's most potent asset (L. Li & Wang, 2021). Considering its significance, scholars have recently shown an increased interest in improving employees' innovative performance (Chaubey, Sahoo, & Khatri, 2019; Duc, Tho, Nakandala, & Lan, 2020).

As a result, the Malaysian government has implemented the Malaysia National Policy on Industry 4.0 (Industry4RWD) to address the imperative of equipping the Malaysian workforce to confront the demands of the ever-changing global landscape. The Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) oversee talent and human capital in this context (Kamaliah et al., 2021). Moreover, the Industry4WRD initiative aims to enhance workplace innovation capacity and capability by elevating the percentage of employees engaged in high-skilled occupations from 18 to 35 percent (Ling, Abdul Hamid, & Chuan, 2020).

An efficient and inclusive labor market will resolve mismatches in workforce demand and supply and enable all Malaysians to participate in and benefit from the nation's economic growth; that is important to ensure that the skilled workforce stays with their job (Latif, Saraih, & Harada, 2019). Furthermore, the experiences of some countries show how innovation plays a key role in driving economic growth and creating value, such as an innovation ecosystem facilitating activities and research culture (MEB, 2015).

The illustration in Figure 1.1 depicts innovation ecosystems that foster collaboration among academic and research institutions, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), large corporations, and investors. These ecosystems facilitate the pooling of resources and joint efforts in nurturing, advancing, and bringing new ideas to the market, focusing on driving growth in national priority areas. By cultivating such effective innovation ecosystems, Malaysia will strategically position itself to engage in robust research, development, and commercialization (R, D&C) initiatives, thus enhancing its competitiveness on the global economic stage.



Figure 1.1 : Visual Representation of an Innovation Ecosystem

(Source: Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) Malaysian Ministry of Education)

Previous studies have reported higher education institutions play a crucial role due to their capacity to lead to innovativeness through creating products and providing services (Ibus, Wahab, Ismail, & Omar, 2020; Moon, Mariadoss, & Johnson, 2019). Developing intellectuals, leaders, and future change-makers through higher education institutions results in social and cultural shifts away from research-based practices, such as providing and expanding skills and knowledge through training and educational programs toward sustainable societal patterns (Filho et al., 2020).

In line with this, Malaysia's government has taken significant steps to promote an innovation-driven economy. Notably, specialized entities like the Special Unit for Innovation, known as Unit Inovasi Khas (UNIK), and the Malaysia Innovation Agency or Agensi Inovasi Malaysia (AIM), have been set up within the framework of the Prime Minister's office. These units have been strategically established as pivotal hubs for driving innovation nationwide. Their establishment is anticipated to play a pivotal role in fostering the growth of a dynamic pool of innovative human resources. As a result of these endeavors, the Ministry of Higher Education has been proactively involved in the establishment of Research Universities (RUs), the implementation of the Acceleration Programme for Excellence (APEX) initiative, and the establishment

of Higher Institution Centres of Excellence (HiCoEs) within universities. These initiatives aim to showcase universities' progressive development and elevate scientific excellence standards across various educational institutions in Malaysia (Nordin, 2020).

In alignment with this strategy, the Malaysian budget for the year 2022 reflects a substantial allocation of RM423 million to the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MOSTI) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). This allocation amplifies the momentum of research and development (R&D) endeavors. Among this allocation, RM295 million has been earmarked specifically for public universities. This investment is intended to sustain the research and innovation ecosystem within these universities while concurrently fostering a climate of collaboration with various industries (Bernama, 2021).

The government of Malaysia has consistently provided significant financial support to all public higher education institutions. Notably, over the past few years, there has been a gradual and consistent rise in the allocation of funds by the Malaysian government to advance higher education. This financial commitment is underscored by the allocation of RM45.1 billion, encompassing funding for educational initiatives, training programs, and research and development efforts (Olesen et al., 2022). This rapid upsurge in government spending on higher education is shown from RM235 Million in 2017 to RM364 million in 2023 allocated for research, development, and commercialization (New Straits Times, 2022).

However, derived from the Global Competitiveness Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2019, Malaysian research and development ranked 39; meanwhile, the prominence of Malaysian research institutions was ranked 38 (World Economic Forum, 2019). Therefore, considering Malaysia's substantial funds to its higher education sector, it is imperative to question how Malaysian public universities have progressed in output performance (Ehido, Halim, & Awang, 2019). Besides, in the 2020 Universitas 21 Ranking, Malaysia attained the 27th position in the output grading evaluated by research productivity and impact, the standard of research, student employability, and other output-connected measures (Anne Leahy & Williams, 2020). In addition, according to The Times Higher Education World University Rankings report for 2023, the Malaysian public universities' highest position is Universiti Malaya, which was ranked 351-400 compared to 301-350 in 2022. Besides, under impact rankings on the industry, innovation, and infrastructure category, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia was ranked 53 in 2022 compared to 2021 was ranked 66. However, of the 20 public universities, only 10 were ranked in this category (Times Higher Education, 2023). Thus, Malaysian public universities are expected to perform better, considering the position gained by the Malaysian government in its expenditure on higher education. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize academic job-related satisfaction and the degree to which work involvements are satisfying, pleasant, and free from strain for better performance.

The Malaysian federal government has implemented a categorization framework for the nation's public universities to achieve international excellence. This framework involves classifying these institutions into three distinct groups: Research/Apex Universities (RAUs), Comprehensive Universities (CUs), and Focused Universities (FUs). The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) oversees and manages this categorization process (Ahmad, Yee, & Farley, 2019). It's essential to note that these designations are not fixed but are subject to regular evaluation and scrutiny through the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA). The MyRA evaluates university performance based on four primary parameters: human capital, publication output, innovation patterns, and intellectual property rights, as well as revenue generation. The intricate evaluation process underscores the commitment to maintaining the designated status of each university and ensuring the delivery of high-quality outcomes (Olesen et al., 2022). As a consequence, the academic staff and university administration bear a considerable weight of responsibility in striving to meet these expectations.

Academic staff assessment encompasses evaluating their contributions to teaching, learning, administrative duties, research grant acquisition, publication endeavors, research supervision, and engagement in professional services (Tengah, Mohamad Husin, & Mohamad Zan, 2022). Academic staff in Malaysia typically devote 7.98 hours of their working time to research and 18.19 hours to teaching during a semester. Academics spend roughly 8.61 hours teaching during semester breaks and 13.46 hours conducting research. These figures demonstrate that academic staff are occupied during semester breaks (Ehido et al., 2019). The responsibilities of academic staff in Malaysia have grown progressively demanding due to the need to meet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the persistent expectations from universities and stakeholders to produce exceptional and job-ready graduates within the nation (Ehido et al., 2019; Kamarudin & Sarkawi, 2019). Navigating these contemporary workplace challenges necessitates a heightened level of dedication from staff members in public universities. Consequently, employers must grasp and acknowledge the elements that contribute to the innovative performance of academics. Identifying these factors is intricately intertwined with the job performance of the workforce, ultimately influencing overall profitability and productivity (Ibus, Wahab, & Ismail, 2020).

The evolving changes within higher educational institutions have presented a significant challenge to the higher education sector, urging them to enhance the quality of their teaching and learning services (Bhagat & Kim, 2020; Ghani & Shahdan, 2016). Various studies have suggested that leadership style contributes to employees' innovative performance (Alghamdi, 2018; Duc et al., 2020; Ye, Wang, & Guo, 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions need a suitable leadership style that encourages academic staff's performance in delivering high-quality research and excellent teaching (Filho et al., 2020). Universities require a harmonious interaction between academic staff and the working environment to sustain their ongoing innovation and performance enhancement progress (Wibowo et al., 2020).

1.2 Overview of the Malaysian Higher Education Sector

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are acknowledged as knowledge-centric entities at the forefront of driving societal and cultural transformations through research-driven insights and the education of intellectuals, leaders, and future shapers (Joseph & Ketlhoilwe, 2019). Within the service sector, HEIs ensure job stability and increased income opportunities for a diverse range of stakeholders, encompassing students, parents, employers, the industrial sector, local and regional communities, government bodies, accreditation agencies, and beyond. Their influence on socioeconomic and social advancement underscores the mutual benefits derived from these institutions (M. Cheng, Adekola, Albia, & Cai, 2022; Manzoor, Ho, & Al Mahmud, 2021). Besides, the industrial sector would demand higher qualification candidates be employed due to the new era of the Industrial Revolution (Quaratul, Humaidi, & Shahrom, 2020; Maria et al., 2018). Hence, the higher education sector should proactively prepare itself to restructure its framework. This entails adapting teaching and mentoring methodologies, refining research and development for commercialization endeavors, and excelling in domains specified by the government's strategic plan objectives (Olesen et al., 2022).

Malaysian public higher education institutions operating under the Ministry of Higher Education's jurisdiction are funded by the government. These institutions are organized into distinct categories. The first category encompasses public universities that deliver a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The category research universities, focused universities, and comprehensive universities. The second category comprises polytechnics and community colleges offering certificate and diploma-level courses. Finally, there are public colleges that also provide programs at the certificate and diploma levels. According to information from the Ministry of Higher Education's official website, 20 Public Universities, 36 Polytechnics, 105 Community Colleges, and 434 Private Higher Education institutions operate under the ministry's purview (Education Malaysia Global Services, 2023). Table 1.1 provides an overview of the public universities in Malaysia.

Table 1.1 : List of Public Universities in Malaysia

No	Public university	QS Malaysia University Ranking (2022)	QS Asia University Ranking (2022)	QS World University Ranking (2022)
1	Universiti Malaya	1	8	65
2	Universiti Putra Malaysia	2	27	143
3	Universiti Sains Malaysia	4	35	147
4	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	3	33	144
5	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	5	38	191
6	Universiti Utara Malaysia	9	98	511 - 520
7	Universiti Teknologi MARA	10	105	651 - 700
8	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia	12	123	651 - 700
9	Universiti Malaysia Pahang	13	129	801 - 1000
10	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	16	167	1001 - 1200
11	Universiti Malaysia Perlis	23	251 - 260	801 - 1000
12	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	20	227	1001 - 1200
13	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	21	227	1001 - 1200
14	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	19	205	-
15	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia	22	247	-
16	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka	32	401 - 450	-
17	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	35	501 - 550	-
18	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia	34	501 - 550	-
19	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	36	551 - 600	-
20	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia	-	-	-

Back in 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) formulated the Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint (2015-2025) with a distinct vision in mind: to establish a higher education system that garners global recognition and positions Malaysia competitively on the international economic stage (Suhaimi, Abdul Halim, & Hashim, 2022; Da Wan, Sirat, & Abdul Razak, 2020). This Blueprint was meticulously crafted around five key aspirations: access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. These aspirations collectively contribute to Malaysia's overarching objective of ascending to the status of a high-income nation (Wan, Sirat, & Abdul Razak, 2018).

A central aim outlined in the Blueprint centers on expanding enrollment in higher education institutions. This expansion is underpinned by a deep emphasis on three pivotal factors: the caliber of graduates produced, the excellence of educational institutions, and the overall quality of the educational system. To ensure the realization of these aspirations, academic staff members in public universities are held accountable by performance indicators that were introduced in alignment with the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020. These performance indicators exhibit some variations across the spectrum of public universities in Malaysia but invariably encompass

assessment criteria spanning teaching and learning, research and publication, administrative responsibilities, and advisory engagements (Nik Ahmad, Siraj, & Ismail, 2019).

Malaysian universities have demonstrated substantial growth in research output, with the number of research publications increasing by approximately 15% annually over the past five years. In 2022, universities collectively published over 20,000 research papers in international journals, many of which featured innovative methodologies and findings (Ministry of Higher Education, 2023). Additionally, academic staff from higher institutions filed over 500 patents in 2022, marking a 10% increase from the previous year. There has also been a 12% increase in revenue generated from the commercialization of academic research between 2021 and 2023 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2022).

The Malaysian government allocated RM 1.2 billion (USD 290 million) for research and development in higher education for 2022, a 5% increase from the previous year. This funding includes specific grants targeting innovative research projects, which make up 40% of the total research budget (StudyMalaysia.com, 2023). Furthermore, over 3,000 academic staff participated in professional development programs focused on innovation in 2023, reflecting a 20% increase in participation in international conferences and workshops aimed at enhancing innovative research skills (StudyMalaysia.com, 2023).

Surveys by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) indicate that 78% of academic staff feel supported by their institutions in conducting innovative research. Additionally, 65% of respondents noted that their universities have recognition and reward systems specifically for innovative achievements, boosting their motivation and performance (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2022).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to innovation. In Malaysian higher institutions, both inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles are significant antecedents to innovative performance. Leaders who practice inclusive leadership create an environment where academic staff feel valued and empowered to share their ideas, leading to higher levels of engagement and innovation. Ambidextrous leaders, who balance exploration (innovation) and exploitation (efficiency), effectively manage the dual demands of academic roles, fostering an innovative culture while maintaining operational excellence.

By focusing on these aspects, Malaysian higher institutions are making significant strides in enhancing innovative behavior and performance among their academic staff, thereby contributing to the overall development and competitiveness of the nation's higher education landscape.

1.3 Issues of Academic Profession in the Higher Education

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are in a period of transformation, and they play a pivotal role in creating and disseminating knowledge through research and education programs that benefit communities (Duval-Couetil, Ladisch, & Yi, 2020). Among the significant hurdles that organizations, including HEIs, often confront is the task of cultivating exceptional leaders capable of bridging the gap between academic research transformation and creating innovations with tangible effects on the economy and society (Al-Husseini, El Beltagi, & Moizer, 2021). Thus, one of the solutions to achieve this goal is to encourage academic staff to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), such as through supervisory behavior, job challenge, autonomy, role performance and image outcome, personality traits, person-organization fit, and trust in the supervisor (Ibus, Wahab, & Ismail, 2020). As a result, employees with IWB are more innovative in performing their jobs (Vithayaporn & Suwaree Ashton, 2019). Accordingly, leadership style practice by academic leaders plays a critical role in introducing innovative processes, boosting organizational commitment, and reducing voluntary turnover among academic staff (Al-maaitah, Majali, Alsoud, & Al-maaitah, 2021). However, in an educational setting, it's essential for an academic leader to embrace a leadership style that aligns with the environment, fostering strategies that encourage innovation among academic staff (Al-Husseini et al., 2021).

Academic staff, sometimes referred to as lecturer is an employee who works in a university with multiple roles such as teaching, clinician, researcher, student supervisor, and administrator (Y. Awang, Mohamed, Ahmad, & Mohd Nasir, 2021). Surveys such as that conducted by Li and Wang (2021) and Sheriff and Abdullah (2017) have shown that teaching activities have become a stressful profession, and academic staff faces more pressure from the management due to competitive pressure from other universities. Universities worldwide compete to receive a better rank in achieving an excellent university in a country, continent, and world. Therefore, as a core contribution to the university's performance, academic staff are pressured to accelerate their performance by participating in world-class research and innovative projects to reach this ultimate goal.

Furthermore, the academic faculty within any university grapples with the persistent weight of assessment tied to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These KPIs encompass facets like teaching effectiveness, research output, supervisory roles, publication achievements, and consultancy contributions (Ali et al., 2023). As a result, a recent online survey carried out by the National Education Association among educators unveiled a concerning statistic. Approximately 55% of academic staff expressed a higher likelihood of considering job departure, attributing their decision to the overwhelming burden of burnout and dissatisfaction stemming from their roles within their respective institutions (Tim Walker, 2022).

Several studies have found that leadership styles play an important role in influencing job satisfaction and innovative performance in a workplace by exhibiting specific behaviors toward their subordinates (Al-Smadi & Qblan, 2015; Bannay, Hadi, & Amanah, 2020a; Hudie, Yun, & Fuqiang, 2017). For instance, a leader who shows concern for employees by giving direction and support and having social relationships with subordinates tends to decrease burnout and job dissatisfaction while encouraging innovative activities at the workplace. However, research focusing on these issues is very limited in the context of higher education institutions (Asiedu, Anyigba, Ofori, Ampong, & Addae, 2020).

However, disregarding and failing to recognize the significance of leadership style on innovative performance among academic staff have resulted in job stress and decreased performance, negatively impacting their health and well-being (Y. Awang et al., 2021; Johnson, Willis, & Evans, 2018). Accordingly, low-level performance among academic staff may affect the quality of their work, and as a result, they prefer to leave their careers and regret choosing an academic career (Aboramadan, Dahleez, & Hamad, 2020; Johnson, Willis, & Evans, 2019). Thus, these implications affect not solely the quality of academic jobs but also the quality of higher education institutions (Janib et al., 2021).

1.4 Problem Statement

Tertiary institutions worldwide have implemented various strategies to boost employee performance, with successful Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) relying heavily on the innovative performance of their academic staff (Mudrak et al., 2018; Muthu & Chelliah, 2022). Nonetheless, recent years have witnessed transformations within the academic field. These shifts encompass reduced perceptions of autonomy and job security, an uptick in student enrollments with a heightened emphasis on teaching quality, and an increased focus on elevating the caliber of research contributions (Johnson et al., 2019). Furthermore, academic staff responsibility has become more challenging due to the requirement to fulfill the yearly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in measuring their performance (Ngoc & Anh, 2020). Therefore, these factors have been pressured by management toward academic staff, leading to increased workplace stress and performance (Ehido et al., 2019).

Academic staff innovative performance has been identified as the competence of employee behaviors contributing to the innovative outcome and, as a result, benefits organizational performance (Alghamdi, 2018; L. Li & Wang, 2021). However, organizations that do not prioritize their employees' innovative performance often experience challenges such as low productivity, high staff turnover, and weak profit margins (Lai, Hossin, Li, Wang, & Hosain, 2022). Thus, a skilled workforce capable of adapting to and using technology and knowledge is crucial for companies, particularly in higher education institutions as it influences employee innovative performance, which is further impacted by factors like working environment, job security, workload, and promotion opportunities (Omar Din, Zainal, & Balakrishna, 2023). Moreover, despite the

core focus of universities on teaching, research, and shared learning, many academicians prioritize self-preservation over the collective goal of knowledge creation, viewing knowledge as a valuable asset to be retained rather than shared (Asiedu et al., 2020). This mindset hinders their recognition of the benefits of collaborative scholarly efforts in enhancing their own performance. To ensure competitive advantage, inclusive and ambidextrous leadership capabilities may be viewed as dynamic capabilities that can stimulate innovative work behavior and improve innovative performance in Higher Education Institutions. Hence, delving into the factors that facilitate innovative employee performance holds particular significance, especially within higher education. Prior research has shed light on elements that foster innovative performance, including intrinsic motivation and individual traits of employees (Xiang, Chen, & Zhao, 2017). Thus, it is believed that addressing the challenges in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions could be achieved by studying the influence of factors that drive innovative performance.

Many organizations recognize the importance of having innovative employees in achieving their goals, as an organization's success is measured by the performance and results achieved by its employees (Hajiali et al., 2022). However, researchers suggest that uncertainty surrounds the identification of factors contributing to barriers in employee innovative performance within businesses, including technology, the surrounding environment, business resources, management practices, and collective and individual factors (Torres de Oliveira, Gentile-Lüdecke, & Figueira, 2022). This uncertainty underscores the need for a case-by-case study approach, especially when identifying drivers of employee innovative performance across different types of businesses.

In today's business landscape, leaders and managers recognize innovation as crucial for enhancing employee performance, ensuring organizational profitability, and maintaining business relevance (C. Fischer, Malycha, & Schafmann, 2019). While many businesses believe that technology and financial capability are key to fostering creativity, innovation, and profitability, Malaysian universities' involvement in innovation activities such as development research and industry collaboration remains limited and unsatisfactory (Ramli & Senin, 2021). This may be attributed to universities' research goals, which typically focus on creating new knowledge or ideas associated with basic research (Vetoshkina, Lamberg, Ryymin, Rintala, & Paavola, 2023), and their reliance on government funding (Henry, Ghani, Hamid, & Bakar, 2020), despite the introduction of schemes like the Industrial Research and Development Grant Scheme (IGS), Government High Technology (MIGHT), the Malaysian Technology Development Corporation (MTDC), the Intensification of Research in Priority Areas (IRPA), and TechnoFund (Ramli & Senin, 2021). However, these resources are limited and insufficient to cover all public universities in Malaysia. Therefore, several innovative projects in the development research stage faced challenges such as difficulty in achieving objectives, termination during collaboration, delays, and limited financial resources, making innovation activities challenging (Ismail, Kot, Abd Aziz, & Rajiani, 2020; Serdyukov, 2017). Overcoming these obstacles requires addressing issues inherent in the firm's structure and business environment. In addition, managers in the company have

the responsibility to foster employee innovative performance (Papa, Dezi, Gregori, Mueller, & Miglietta, 2020a). Therefore, it is believed that higher education institutions need to focus on management approaches to enhance employee innovation performance.

Higher learning institutions play a pivotal role in the intellectual and economic advancement of many countries, driving innovation, knowledge dissemination, and skill development across various disciplines. However, employee innovative performance is a pressing issue in higher learning institutions, with many academic staff members struggling to innovate effectively (Purwanto, 2020a). Contributing factors to this challenge encompass technology, the surrounding environment, business resources, management practices, and collective and individual attributes (Apa, De Marchi, Grandinetti, & Sedita, 2021). (Foo, Lee, & Gan, 2023) indicates that institutions with higher levels of employee satisfaction with their job not only perform better but also experience lower rates of absenteeism and turnover, which are common challenges in the education sector. Additionally, the workplace stress experienced by academic staff can significantly impact their innovative performance (Budur, Demirer, & Rashid, 2024). The high responsibilities and various tasks required in academia, such as delivering high-quality education, conducting research, and contributing to the academic community, can create pressure and mental strain (Ngoc & Anh, 2020). This stress may hinder creativity and innovative thinking, as individuals may struggle to generate new ideas or approaches when they are overwhelmed or burned out (R. C. Anderson, Bousselot, Katz-Buoincontro, & Todd, 2021). Therefore, addressing workplace stress and providing support for academic staff can be crucial in enhancing their innovative performance (Rafique et al., 2022).

Public Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia play a crucial role in fostering intellectual growth, driving innovation, and producing skilled graduates essential for the nation's progress. These institutions are classified into three categories that is Research University, Comprehensive University, and Focused University, each with a mission to become a world-class institution that aligns with the Ministry of Higher Education's objective to promote Malaysian universities to the world's top 100, if not top 50, through programs like the "Accelerated Program for Excellence (APEX)" (Yaacob, Yeon, & Abdul Rahman, 2018). Among the 20 public universities, five are categorized as Research Universities, focusing primarily on research and innovation activities, driven by highly competent academics and competitive student admissions. Two public universities located on the east coast of Malaysia, namely Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), fall under the category of Focused University (*List of Malaysian Public and Private Universities*, 2021). However, reports from QS Top Universities indicate that these universities have shown no progress in their performance. UMT's performance was ranked between 1001-1200 from 2020 to 2024, while UniSZA was ranked 93 in 2023 to 117 in 2024 ("QS Top Universities," 2024). This decline in rankings may be relevant to employee innovative performance in these two young universities.

The performance of higher education institutions heavily relies on its core resources, namely academic staff (Muthu & Chelliah, 2022). Academic staff play a crucial role in advancing knowledge, innovation, and research, which are vital for addressing societal challenges and driving economic growth. The decline in rankings of universities may be attributed to the low job satisfaction experienced by academic staff, which leads to limited innovativeness activities (Fernandes & Singh, 2022). (Ramli, Majid, Ya'acob, & Badyalina, 2021) noted that barriers such as inadequate financial support and incentives in public universities remain limited, leading to challenges for academic staff in commercializing their research findings. In Malaysia, researchers are facing a significant challenge with commercializing their findings, as only a limited number of research findings from universities are being successfully commercialized. This lack of progress and encouragement in commercializing research findings among academicians is a cause for concern. The Malaysian National Survey of R&D 2016 by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation revealed an overall increase in expenditures and headcounts but a decrease in research output. Additionally, the Malaysian Ministry of Education stated that, out of RM1.152 billion research grants disbursed, only 20 completed research projects were successfully commercialized, generating a mere 3.2 percent income with RM7.6 million in revenues (Muda et al., 2021). Academic staff are expected to handle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, supervising students, conducting research, publishing, providing consultancy services, and facilitating commercialization (Perkmann, Salandra, Tartari, McKelvey, & Hughes, 2021). This limitation in commercialization efforts may contribute to a decrease in their innovative performance (Ramli et al., 2021).

Therefore, effectively managing these responsibilities requires emotional intelligence, which is predictive of their job performance. Academic staff who experience mutual respect and supportive environments from their superiors and colleagues tend to perform better (Chong, Falahat, & Lee, 2020). Additionally, a stimulating and conducive work environment can enhance academic staff performance through supportive management practices that foster innovation, including effective leadership (Mehrad, 2020).

The study aims to address the issue of academic staff's innovative performance at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). The first point, as suggested by previous literature suggests that superiors need to understand the factors that motivate employees to increase their job satisfaction and innovative performance (Riyanto, Endri, & Herlisha, 2021). This understanding is crucial because employee motivation not only engages them in their work but also encourages them to perform at their best (Schaufeli, 2021). Employees are valuable resources for companies, and their motivation and satisfaction are essential for boosting their performance. However, it is not solely the responsibility of employees to motivate themselves; it is also the role of leaders to motivate them (Schaufeli, 2021). This notion is agreed by previous studies, who suggested that public higher education institutions should have appropriate leadership styles and innovative work behavior factors to enhance innovative performance (M. A. Khan, Ismail, Hussain, & Alghazali, 2020; Purwanto, Purba, Sijabat, & Bernarto, 2021). It is

crucial to recognize the significant impact of leadership styles in creating an environment conducive to enhancing and elevating employees' innovative performance (P. T. Nguyen, Yandi, & Mahaputra, 2020). Leadership styles such as transformational and transactional leadership have been found to lead to innovative employee performance (Jameel & Ahmad, 2019a; Mwesigwa, Tusiime, & Ssekiziyivu, 2020). Transformational leadership, in particular, has garnered significant attention in the innovation literature, often viewed as a catalyst for team innovation due to its emphasis on inspiration, change, and creativity (Zaman, Nawaz, & Nadeem, 2020). However, despite its strong theoretical foundation, some scholars argue that transformational leadership, while influential, might be too broad to drive innovative performance (Klonek, Gerpott, & Parker, 2020). Empirical studies examining the relationship between leadership and employee innovative performance have yielded varying results (Ye et al., 2019). While some researchers propose that inclusive and ambidextrous leadership presents a pragmatic and promising approach to encouraging innovative performance, investigations into this link remain insufficient (Gong, Liu, Rong, & Fu, 2021a; F. Zhao, Hu, Ahmed, & Huang, 2021). Inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles are significant in influencing employees' innovative performance and are crucial for achieving continuous organizational success (Alghamdi, 2018; Mansoor, Wahab, & Jahan, 2021). Previous studies have highlighted the substantial impact of leadership styles on the innovative performance of academic staff (Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Both inclusive leadership (Javed, Abdullah, Zaffar, Haque, & Rubab, 2019) and ambidextrous leadership (Gerlach, Hundeling, & Rosing, 2020) have been examined to understand their relationship with innovative performance.

The second point is also based on past literature, which suggests that IWB is able to increase employee innovative performance and job satisfaction through leadership style (P. B. Santoso, Zuniawan, Wijayanti, & Hadi, 2020). Baig et al. (2021) stated that leadership style is a major driver in enhancing employee innovative performance (Baig et al., 2021). In addition, IWB is needed to support employee innovative performance in this research. Past studies on innovative performance focus on influencing factors related to organizational performance, knowledge sharing, human resources practices, psychological empowerment, and so on (Almulhim, 2020; Malik, Sarwar, & Orr, 2021). However, very limited research has focused on mapping out innovative performance through inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, and innovative work behavior perspectives jointly (Aboramadan, Dahleez, & Farao, 2020; Bataineh et al., 2022). The literature suggests that the concepts of innovative performance and leadership style should be dealt with separately, but there is very limited research that extensively attempts to investigate the relationship between the two concepts, particularly at the individual level (Usman, Ghani, Islam, Gul, & Mahmood, 2022). Past research has examined the relationship between inclusive leadership (Aboramadan, Dahleez, & Farao, 2020; Bataineh et al., 2022) and ambidextrous leadership (Alghamdi, 2018; Ruhnke & Mulder, 2016), as well as the influence of IWB in various private and public organizations. However, these studies did not discuss the effect of employee innovative performance in their research. Thus, there is a need for more empirical research to support the theoretical proposition on the relationship of inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership,

and innovative performance. The inclusion of mediators or moderators as intervening variables could also be examined comprehensively (M. M. Khan, Mubarik, & Islam, 2021). For example, Purwanto (2020) suggest the relationship between leadership styles and innovative performance can be moderated by IWB (Purwanto, 2020b). Studying employees' IWB is crucial because organizational innovation starts with employees exploring and generating new ideas, which then need support from supervisors for successful implementation (Grobbs, 2022). Understanding employees' IWB is essential as they are the primary drivers of both employee and organizational innovation. Additionally, innovative employees are a valuable and unique competitive advantage for organizations. To retain such resources, organizations must understand the factors that foster and promote IWB among their employees (Usman et al., 2022). Leadership also plays a vital role in fostering employees' IWB, as decision-making in organizations is typically dependent on leaders and can be informal and autocratic (Miller & Miller, 2020). Public universities often exhibit bureaucratic structures, inflexible policies, and protracted decision-making processes, which can impede the implementation of innovative ideas (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2020). Additionally, academic staff in public universities face particular pressures, such as juggling teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019). Hence, examining the specific dynamics of IWB and its impact on innovative performance in public universities is crucial. Moreover, past research has shown that IWB mediates the relationship to enhance employees' innovative performance. Therefore, this study intends to elaborate on the relationship of inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, and innovative performance with the mediating effect of IWB.

The third point, is based on the limited research that has been carried out in the Asian Region, such as Malaysia that link both leadership and innovative performance (Shaikh Ibrahim & Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020). On the other hand, more researches have been focusing on the western context (Ibus, Wahab, Ismail, et al., 2020), or within the business organizations such as in the textile industry (Javed, Naqvi et al., 2019), private hospitals (Bataineh et al., 2022), and manufacturing companies (Ruhnke and Mulder, 2016) and only a handful addressing the higher education sector (Hiebl & Pielsticker, 2023; Schnellbacher, Heidenreich, & Wald, 2019).

Finally, Despite the increasing recognition of IWB and its association with innovative performance, studies are scarce that integrate these concepts and identify the influence of work experience on these relationships (T. Nayak, Sahoo, & Mohanty, 2018; Sikul, Harun, Mohta, & Eranza, 2015). Work experience refers to an academic staff duration in their current role or within the academic field (Aboramadan, Dahleez, & Hamad, 2020). It is reasonable to assume that individuals with varying experience levels will exhibit diverse levels of IWB and, subsequently, different degrees of innovative performance (H. Li et al., 2019). Work experience can affect an academic staff knowledge base, professional networks, and familiarity with institutional processes, thereby shaping their ability to engage in and benefit from IWB (Tengah et al., 2022). The research constructs of this study have been examined within the Western

context. Therefore, this study addresses the existing void by presenting a comprehensive perspective encompassing both inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles, IWB, and innovative performance among academic staff at public universities in Malaysia, aiming to understand how these dynamics operate in a different cultural and institutional context.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions for the dissertation have been drafted as follows:

- 1) Does inclusive leadership have significant effects on innovative performance?
- 2) Does ambidextrous leadership have significant effects on innovative performance?
- 3) Does inclusive leadership have significant effects on innovative work behavior?
- 4) Does ambidextrous leadership have significant effects on innovative work behavior?
- 5) Does innovative work behavior have significant effects on academic staff's innovative performance?
- 6) Does innovative work behavior mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative performance?
- 7) Does innovative work behavior mediate the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative performance?
- 8) Does work experience moderate the relationship between innovative work behavior and innovative performance?

1.6 Research Objectives

Generally, this study aims to identify the relationships between inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, work experience, IWB, and innovative performance among academic staff in public universities in East Malaysia. Specifically, this study aims:

- 1) To examine the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative performance.
- 2) To examine the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative performance.
- 3) To examine the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior.
- 4) To examine the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative work behavior.

- 5) To examine the relationship between innovative work behavior and innovative performance.
- 6) To examine the mediating effect of innovative work behavior on the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative performance.
- 7) To examine the mediating effect of innovative work behavior on the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative performance.
- 8) To examine the moderating role of work experience on the relationship between innovative work behavior and innovative performance.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research extends to both theoretical and practical realms. It specifically examines the structure within the academic staff of public universities in Malaysia. The theoretical value is derived from its contribution to the innovative performance literature, as it discerns the direct influencers on the inventive capabilities of academic staff. This contribution expands existing literature and unifies the perspectives of inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles, IWB, and innovative performance. Thus, this study enriches knowledge and broadens comprehension by establishing a fundamental platform for comprehending the factors that impact innovative performance among academic staff, presenting a holistic perspective on these interconnected concepts.

The study has thoroughly engaged with the body of contributing knowledge by meticulously exploring the correlations between inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, IWB, and innovative performance. While existing research has explored these variables to a certain extent, it becomes evident that empirical exploration has its constraints. These limitations become particularly pronounced when considering the intricate connections between inclusive leadership, ambidextrous leadership, IWB, and innovative performance—especially within the context of higher education establishments within the Southeast Asian region (Nair & V., 2020; M. Yang, Al Mamun, & Salameh, 2023). Moreover, the outcomes of this study also furnish both a theoretical foundation and empirical substantiation for inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles that are essential for stimulating IWB among academic staff at public universities. Besides, this study adds to constructing models grounded in Human Resource Development professionals through training and development programs on preparing academic leaders to manage their subordinates to enhance innovative performance. Furthermore, this study adds to IWB and innovative performance concepts.

This study presents an additional contribution within the realm of IWB literature. It achieves this by investigating the mediating effect of IWB in two key relationships: firstly, the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative performance, and secondly, the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative performance among academic staff at public

universities. The deliberate analysis of IWB as a mediator stands to enhance comprehension by potentially unveiling an underlying mechanism. This mechanism could potentially explain how the dynamic between inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles and innovative performance operates among academic staff in public universities. Even though IWB is considered a critical concept and practice for modern organizations, most existing literature focuses on business organizations, and very few studies focus on higher educational sectors. There has been limited discussion examining the influences of IWB on individual-level outcomes, such as innovative behavior, creativity, or problem-solving ability, particularly in the higher education sectors (Ibus, Wahab, Ismail, et al., 2020). Hence, this study makes a valuable addition to the existing pool of knowledge by addressing a gap that a lack of empirical exploration has characterized. This is accomplished by investigating the mediating influence of IWB in the correlation between inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles and the innovative performance of academic staff within the context of public universities.

Focusing on inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles is important because these leadership approaches have been shown to significantly influence innovative work behavior (IWB) and overall innovative performance (Haider, Zubair, Tehseen, Iqbal, & Sohail, 2023). Inclusive leadership promotes a supportive and open environment, encouraging academic staff to express their ideas and engage in creative problem-solving (T. V. T. Nguyen, Nguyen, Nong, & Nguyen, 2024). On the other hand, ambidextrous leadership, which balances exploration and exploitation activities, enables leaders to effectively manage the dual demands of innovation and operational efficiency (Jia, Hu, & Li, 2022). By studying these leadership styles, we aim to identify how they contribute to fostering innovation among academic staff in the unique context of Malaysian public universities, thus providing valuable insights for enhancing institutional performance and academic excellence.

Furthermore, the primary objective of this study is to bridge a notable void present within the existing literature. This void pertains to exploring the moderating effect of an individual's work experience on the intricate interplay between IWB and the resultant innovative performance. To achieve this, the study is tailored to the unique setting of public universities, each laden with its own set of distinct challenges and opportunities. By unraveling the nuances of how work experience interacts with the relationship between IWB and innovative performance, this research holds the potential to bestow invaluable understandings upon academic institutions aiming to refine and amplify their strategies for fostering innovation.

The current study provides concrete empirical validation to the prevailing body of literature within an Asian context. Within the distinct context of public universities situated in Malaysia, a conspicuous absence exists in the realm of studies encompassing the constructs under scrutiny in this study—namely, inclusive and ambidextrous leadership styles, IWB, work experience, and innovative performance that lead to hindered their scope (Qi, Liu, Wei, & Hu,

2019). As such, the anticipated outcomes of this study are envisaged to serve as a means of bridging this gap. By doing so, the research aspires to augment and enrich the preexisting reservoir of knowledge. In particular, the insights gleaned from this study are poised to offer an augmented comprehension of how employee innovative performance unfolds within East Malaysia's public universities.

In terms of practical implications, this study offers valuable insights into identifying and cultivating appropriate leadership styles that academic leaders ought to adopt within the context of public universities. A comprehensive grasp of these leadership styles would illuminate academic staff's immediate supervisors, equipping them with the knowledge required to stimulate IWB effectively. Consequently, this understanding would lay the groundwork for fostering innovative performance amongst academic staff within public universities. The implications of this study extend further to Human Resource Development professionals. They can use the findings to assess and enhance training programs for academic staff. This knowledge becomes pivotal in planning strategic Human Resource Development interventions within public universities. Such interventions are devised to elevate the efficacy of talent development initiatives for academic staff. The guiding factor here lies in recognizing and integrating leadership styles that have been empirically identified as instrumental in enhancing academic staff's innovative performance.

1.8 Scope of the Study

As the number of Malaysian public universities is too large and consists of different and various institutions, schools, and faculties, it is quite impractical for the researcher to conduct research in each public university in Malaysia. Hence, to narrow the study's focus, the researcher gathered data exclusively from public universities within a single state on the eastern coast of Malaysia—Terengganu. The primary focus of this study centers on investigating the pivotal role played by IWB in the relationship of two distinctive leadership styles: inclusive leadership and ambidextrous leadership. These leadership styles hold significant relevance concerning fostering innovative performance among the academic staff affiliated with public universities in Malaysia.

The study's scope was delimited to encompass academic staff hailing exclusively from two public universities in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UNISZA) emerged as the institutions under examination. There is limited research specifically examining UMT and UniSZA in the context of leadership styles and innovation. By focusing on these institutions, the study addresses this gap and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the Malaysian higher education landscape. Both universities have distinct institutional cultures, structures, and strategic priorities, providing insights into how these factors influence innovative work behavior (IWB) and innovative performance in different settings. Furthermore, as relatively new universities, UMT and UniSZA

are in critical stages of development where innovative behaviors and effective leadership are essential for growth and establishing their reputations. Understanding how leadership styles impact innovation in these institutions can offer valuable guidance for their future development.

Participants were sought from a broader population that consisted of 683 academic staff members within UMT and 663 academic staff members within UNISZA. These individuals hailed from diverse university institutes, schools, and faculties. The study's primary variables encompassed the distinct dimensions of inclusive leadership—openness, availability, and accessibility—and the nuanced facets of ambidextrous leadership, encompassing both opening and closing leadership behaviors. Additionally, the mediating role of IWB—encompassing idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization—stood as critical components under scrutiny. These variables collectively converged to assess and explore innovative performance within the academic realm.

1.9 Definition of Terms

In Table 1.2, the operational definitions of the study variables are displayed.

Table 1.2 : Operational Definition

Operational definition	
Inclusive leadership	Inclusive leadership refers to leaders who demonstrate openness, accessibility, and availability in their interactions with followers. This leadership style involves behaviors that invite and appreciate input from others, fostering a belief among team members that their voices are genuinely valued. As a core aspect of relational leadership, inclusive leadership ensures that followers feel their leaders are attentive and responsive to their needs, enhancing overall engagement and trust within the team (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010a).
Ambidextrous leadership	Ambidextrous leadership involves the ability to optimize existing resources for exploitative innovation while simultaneously creating new opportunities for exploratory innovation. This dual approach is achieved through a leader's dynamic interplay of opening and closing behaviors, which work together to foster high levels of innovation (Zacher & Rosing, 2015).
Innovative work behavior	Innovative work behavior involves intentionally developing, introducing, and applying new ideas within a job role, group, or organization to enhance performance. It encompasses three key elements: idea generation, idea promotion, and implementation of novel ideas that benefit the organization. This behavior is crucial for driving organizational growth and adapting to changing environments (Janssen, 2000b).
Innovative performance	Job performance refers to the actions required by an employee's job description, which are mandated, evaluated, and rewarded by the organization. These defined rules and procedures ensure predictability in work behavior, allowing basic organizational tasks to be coordinated and controlled to achieve organizational goals. The proficiency with which employees perform their work activities and roles is a key factor influencing variations in job performance (Janssen & Yperen, 2004).
Work Experience	Work experience refers to the length of time an academic staff has spent in their current role or within the academic field.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the study's background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, and research significance. The study briefly introduced the crucial role of the higher education sector in economic growth and how leadership styles contribute to employees' IWB and performance. Additionally, the study discussed the significance of IWB as a mediator and work experience as a moderator. Finally, the variables used in the research framework are

defined and outlined in the organization of the thesis. This entire context was designed to help Malaysia's higher education institutions fine-tune the leadership skills and capabilities requested by a developing country.



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