

AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTION OF ACADEMICS IN MALAYSIA: SOCIAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE

Tek- Yew Lew,
School of Business, Curtin University of Technology Sarawak Malaysia
CDT 250, 98009 Miri Sarawak Malaysia
lew.tek.yew@curtin.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationships between perceived organizational support (POS), felt obligation, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention of academicians working for private higher educational institutions in Malaysia. This paper is driven theoretically by the social exchange theory, the concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which is the commitment of the organization to the employee, the norm of reciprocity, the organizational support theory as well as the other relevant literature in the human resource management and organizational behaviour research. This paper contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the psychological processes underlying the formation of organizational commitment through the perspectives of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Keywords: Perceived Organizational Support, affective organizational commitment, turnover intention.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that the exchange relationship between two parties often goes beyond economic exchange and includes social exchange. Hence, organizational studies argue that employer and employee exchange not only impersonal resources such as money, but also socioemotional resources such as approval, respect, recognition and support (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). In organizational researches, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the concept of perceived organizational support have been applied to describe the psychological process underlying the employee attitudes and behaviours (Setton, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). The concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which refers the extent to which the organization values their employees' contributions and cares about their well-being have been used to describe the social exchange relationship between the employer and the employee (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), employees who perceive high levels of POS are more likely to reciprocate the organization with positive attitudes such as higher levels of affective commitment and favorable work behaviours such as commitment to organizational goals and lower intention to leave (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). The arguments above based on the social exchange theory, the concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which is the commitment of the

organization to the employee and the norm of reciprocity is further developed into the organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Since the seminal work on POS by Eisenberger and colleagues (Eisenberger, et al., 1986), many researchers have investigated the effects of POS on important work outcomes such as affective commitment and turnover intention (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Setton et al., 1996; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). Meyer and Allen (1997) also indicated that a common theme linking antecedents to commitment is the extent to which the antecedents signal that the organization is supportive of the employee, consistent with the view that they operate via POS. In short, the underpinning social exchange theory predicts that the exchange of favorable treatment could be prolonged if the receipt of resources from another party is highly in need and valuable and the actions are discretionary (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1997).

2.0 THE HIGHER EDUCATION INDUSTRY

In the context of the higher education industry, Malaysia aims to be an international hub for world class education in its bid to be a big player in the attractive regional education scene and targets about 100,000 foreign students by 2010. It has 18 public universities, four foreign branch campuses of foreign universities, 21 private universities and 500 private colleges (Uda Nagu, 2007). The private institutions of higher learning is playing an equally important role with the public universities to offer quality higher education and attract foreign students to Malaysia who contribute some RM50 million in direct earnings to Malaysia annually (Uda Nagu, 2007). This trend of globalization, liberalization and reforms to the educational system to improve the ranking of the universities brings many challenges on developing ways to improve staff commitment to universities. One primary criteria for world class universities is the ability to attract and retain excellent and experienced academics.

Academics can be considered the operational core of the universities and their performance determines, to a large extent, the quality of the student's higher education experience and thereby on the contribution that such institutions make to the society (Capellaras, 2005). Academic staff who are well motivated and committed to their institution can build a national and international reputation for themselves and the institution and the universities can attract high caliber students, research funds and consultancy contracts (Rowley, 1996). Based on 'The Academic Reputation Survey' conducted by a team led by the Malaysian Qualifications Board (MQA), no public university in Malaysia were rated in the six-star "Outstanding" category while Universiti Sains Malaysia was the only one rated in the 5-star "Excellent" category (Ramachandran & Foo, 2007). Thus, to improve the ratings of Malaysian universities, it is important to develop a pool of excellent and experienced academics as they play strategic roles to improve ratings in key areas such as research quality, academic reputation of faculty, academic programs quality, research contribution to society, preparation of tomorrow's leaders and quality of graduates.

Over the past decades, local universities continue to face the problem of academic staff turnover or "brain drain" (Khoo, 1981). To the best of knowledge, Malaysian universities

may still face the problem of high academic staff turnover though no studies have examined the extent of academic staff turnover in Malaysia in recent years. This voluntary turnover of academic staffs particularly the desirable ones, will not only have a detrimental effect on the institution both in replacement costs and work disruption, but also jeopardize the nation's aim to produce quality human capital and workforce. It is obvious that the institutions cannot get a return from their investment on faculty members' promotion, training and sabbatical leave. Therefore, understanding the factors that precede organizational commitment can enhance better administrative decisions for the financial support program of faculty members and also the ability to attract and retain good academics.

Furthermore, creating a team of committed and high quality academic staff who are committed to improve teaching and learning methods, strengthening research and innovation, strengthening Malaysia's institutions of high learning to world class standards and enhancing internationalization to turn Malaysia into a leading education hub is an important step towards the creation of apex universities in Malaysia as outlined in National Higher Education Strategic Plan (Atan, 2007).

This is because a team of committed academics at the private higher education institutions play complimentary roles with their counterparts in the public higher education institutions to assist the government to develop the human capital who are smart, well-educated and have a first class mentality required to achieve Vision 2020. Meanwhile, the PHEI has to justify whether their HR practices will influence the academics' desirable attitudes and behaviours due to budget constraints.

3.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The higher education industry is very worthy for research as it is now an important sector playing a key role in improving productivity and occupational skills, engaging many academics and students and has numerous links with industrial and community activities as well as enhance the nation's ability to compete in a volatile global knowledge economy (Tight, 2003; Humphreys & Hoque, 2007).

While committed academics are the key towards the successful private universities in Malaysia (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007) and since academics have a high need for support and recognition, there is very little empirical studies thus far which have been conducted to examine the role of perceived organizational support (POS) to enhance the level of affective commitment of academics using the academics working with the private institutions of higher learning (Rowley, 1996; Capelleras, 2005; Joiner and Bakalis, 2006). Moreover, academics perceived that they have 'lost their voice' as the management of private universities had become increasingly reluctant to listen to them, had lost respect for their knowledge and expertise, had increased their teaching loads and the administrative burden had become, unmanageable (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007). Only one study by Fuller et al. (2006) has found that POS was strongly related to academics' affective commitment to the university.

Limited empirical studies such as Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006) conducted thus far centered around the important role of academics to create excellence learning experience and build national and international reputation for themselves and their institutions in the research, publishing and professional areas and such profile may have a significance impact on the ability of the institution to attract high caliber students, research funds and consultancy contracts. However, such achievements depend on exceptionally high level of affective commitment of the academics to their institutions.

This study aims to answer the call from recent studies about the affective commitment level of academics such as Rowley (1996), Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006) for more studies to be conducted to examine the role of perceived organizational support (POS) towards enhancing the level of affective commitment for academics working outside the western countries.

In other words, the study will contribute significantly towards the ‘second wave of development’ as advocated by the Malaysian government which is based on development of the human capital (the sum of the skills, knowledge and general attribute of the people). This is because academics are the ones who produce the future human capital of the state. Hence, this study will also set the research agenda towards understanding the process of creating a pool of committed academic staff of private universities in Malaysia who will contribute towards developing the human capital needed by the nation through creating educated individuals who possessed strong mentality with sharp minds who can spearhead the planning and implementation of projects under the Ninth Malaysian Plan.

4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to find the best fitting model to explain the relationships between POS, felt obligation, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention of academicians working for private higher educational institutions in Malaysia. The hypothesized model is shown below:-

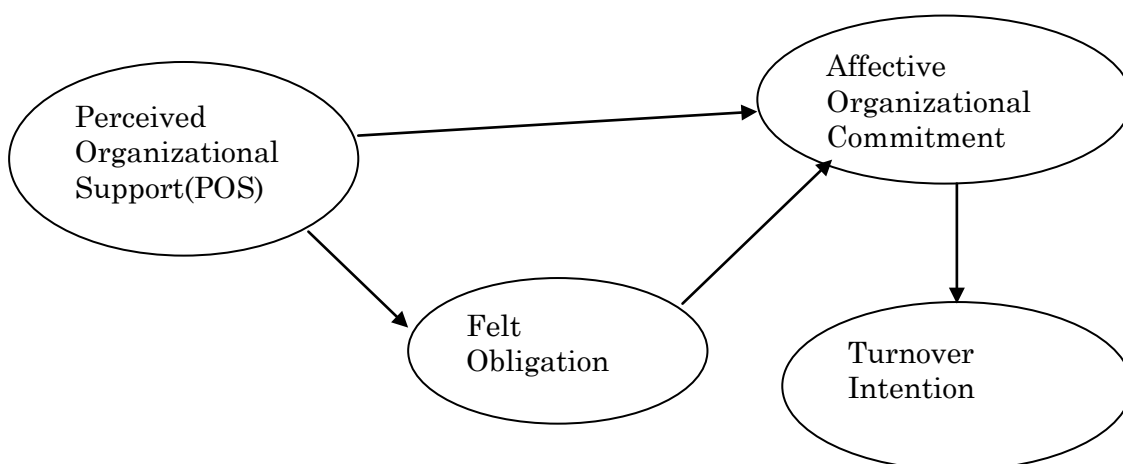


Figure 1: The hypothesized model

5.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has the potential to contribute to the literature in at least the following aspects. First, this study provides further empirical evidence and validates the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and specifically in the aspect of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) in the employer-employee relationship, by investigating the possible mediating role of felt obligation in the POS- work outcomes relationship.

Tansky & Cohen (2001) has identified perceived organizational support to build organizational commitment among employees. In addition, the empirical findings of Meyer and Smith (2001) identified perceived organizational support as a factor that partially mediate the relationships between HRM practices and organizational commitment. Other studies that have link POS and turnover intentions include Rhoades et al. (2001) and Eisenberger et al. (2002) which linked POS with actual turnover using rewards, procedural justice and supervisory support while Allen et al. (2003) suggests that POS mediates supportive HR on turnover via organizational commitment.

In a more recent study, Lee and Peccei (2007) mentioned that studies that examined the processes that underlie the relationship of POS and affective commitment is still limited and suggested future studies to investigate other mechanisms through which POS influences affective commitment such as felt obligation.

Hence, following the findings of Tansky & Cohen (2001), Meyer and Smith (2001), Rhoades et al. (2001) and Eisenberger et al. (2002) and Allen et al. (2003), this study extends knowledge regarding the mediating process through which POS influences employee attitudes and behaviors.

This study examines the relationship between POS and a variety of important work outcomes to provide further insights into the effects of POS. Specifically, this study answers the call by Tan (2008) for more studies to address the gap on the influence of POS between organizational actions and turnover intention for knowledge workers in Malaysia.

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the psychological processes underlying the formation of organizational commitment through the perspectives of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In particular, Oliver (1990) has likened the study of organizational commitment to a “black box” in which various individual and organizational factors determine commitment levels and in turn affect certain behaviors, with scant attention to what happens “in between”.

Second, using a sample of academics working for private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) as the context of study offers interesting insights on the management of knowledge workers. This context warrants urgent investigation as private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) are playing important role to support Malaysia's mission to be the important educational hub. Moreover, knowledge workers are the key source of competitive advantage for the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1999) and most importantly, committed academics will assist the Malaysian Government to develop the quality human capital required by Malaysia. Hence, highly skilled professionals should not be managed as disposable productive resources but rather should be considered as human beings with specific needs and interests (Pare & Tremblay, 2007). Managers need to bolster their sense of self-worth by treating them as intellectual assets, not as operating costs, and by trusting them, supporting their career experiences and fulfill their needs in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage by keeping their employees' skills and experience within the organization rather than outside it (Tan, 2008).

The exploration of the consequences of POS have been widely observed in the Western context and hence, Tan (2008) have mentioned that findings for Asian collective culture such as Malaysian employees is still in the preliminary stages. Besides, Shore et.al. (2006) also suggest that the type of job may be important for understanding exchange relationships.

6.0 METHOD

6.1 Procedures

At least 500 survey forms were distributed to the human resource managers of four private universities in Malaysia which have approved this study, namely Curtin University of Technology Sarawak Malaysia, Multimedia University, Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College and Universiti Teknologi Petronas. Participation was entirely voluntary and the completed questionnaires were forwarded to the HR manager via the internal mail system to maintain anonymity. The researcher collected the completed questionnaires a month after distribution. In total, 134 employees responded, generating an overall response rate of about 27%.

6.2 Participants

The participants were full-time and permanent employees. About 62.7% of the academicians were below 41 years old, their gender were about equal, about 70% are Malaysians and about 55% and 35% were masters and PhD holders respectively. Most of them (47%) were lecturers while 21% were senior lecturers and 15% were associate professors and above. While about 69% of them have more than 5 years of experience as academicians, about 61% of them have less than 5 years tenure at their current university. About 50% of them have less than 10 hours of teaching hours and about 47% of them published less than 5 papers for the past 5 years. Meanwhile, about 60% of them earned less than RM6,001 per month.

6.3 Measures

Through extensive literature review, the variables of this study were measured based on established instruments which have been used by seminal and key past studies as discussed

below. All the variables will be measured by the subjects' responses based on the 5-point Likert-type scales (1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

Perceived organizational support was measured via a twelve high-loading items from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). The validity and unidimensionality of this scale has been substantiated by previous research such as Eisenberger et al. (1990) and Shore and Wayne (1993). A sample item is "My organization really cares about my well-being." The cronbach alpha value was 0.87.

Felt obligation was measured by seven items from the scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (2001) which measures employees' felt obligation to care about the organization and to help the organization reach its goals. A sample item is "I feel a personal obligation to do whatever I can to help my company achieve its goals." The cronbach alpha value was 0.90.

Affective organizational commitment was measured by six items developed by Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) and Meyer & Allen (1997). A sample item is "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this university". The cronbach alpha value was 0.90.

Turnover intention was measured by six items which were adapted from Tuma and Grimes (1981), Landau and Hammer (1986) and Wayne et al. (1997). A sample item is "I am actively looking for a job outside my university." The cronbach alpha value was 0.89.

6.5 Data analysis method

Structural equation modeling (SEM) can be used to conduct a simultaneous test of the entire system of variables in the hypothesized model to examine the extent to which it is consistent with the data (Byrne, 2001). The structural equation modeling (SEM) is chosen to analyze the data because it is a popular statistical technique used by empirical journal articles in the social sciences to test the relationships of independent and dependent variables, is powerful to "redesign" the proposed relationships in the hypothesized model to form several nested models and is more effective in finding the "best fitting" model to the data as suggested by the modification indexes (Cheng, 2001; Kline, 2005; Shore et.al., 2006; Tan, 2008). The SEM is particularly effective to test the hypothesized model in this study that consists of multiple paths to be analyzed with mediating variables, and contain latent constructs such as POS, trust in management, professional commitment, felt obligation, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention that are being measured with multiple indicators (Luna-Arocas and Camps, 2008) . The SEM has been used in many organizational studies such as Eisenberger et al. (2001); Eisenberger et al. (2002); Shore et. al., (2006); Lee & Peccei (2007); Maertz et al. (2007); Pare & Tremblay (2007) and Tan (2008). Moreover, the SEM also excels beyond multiple regression, which is a popular statistical technique to test the relationships of independent and dependent variables, in expanding the explanatory ability and statistical efficiency for parsimonious model testing with a single comprehensive method (Cheng, 2001).

7.0 RESULTS

In this study, path analysis which is a type of structural equation modeling whereby each construct is measured with only one indicator was used to test the model fit for various alternative path models. The single indicator used to measure the various constructs of the study in the path analysis is the average score for each construct. Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Cheng (2001) suggestions, a series of alternative path models were nested with the hypothesized model. However, only those alternative models that are plausible based on alternative theoretical arguments, rather than all possible nested models, are tested. This strategy is also suggested by Hair et al. (2006) and Kline (2005) whereby structural portions of structural models can be respecified by trimming the models to find more parsimonious structural models that explain the data reasonably well. Hence, various alternative path models were constructed based on theoretical knowledge. The structural model for the hypothesized model is represented in Figure 1 below. In this model F1 refers to POS, F3 refers to felt obligation, F4 refers to affective commitment and F5 refers to turnover intention.

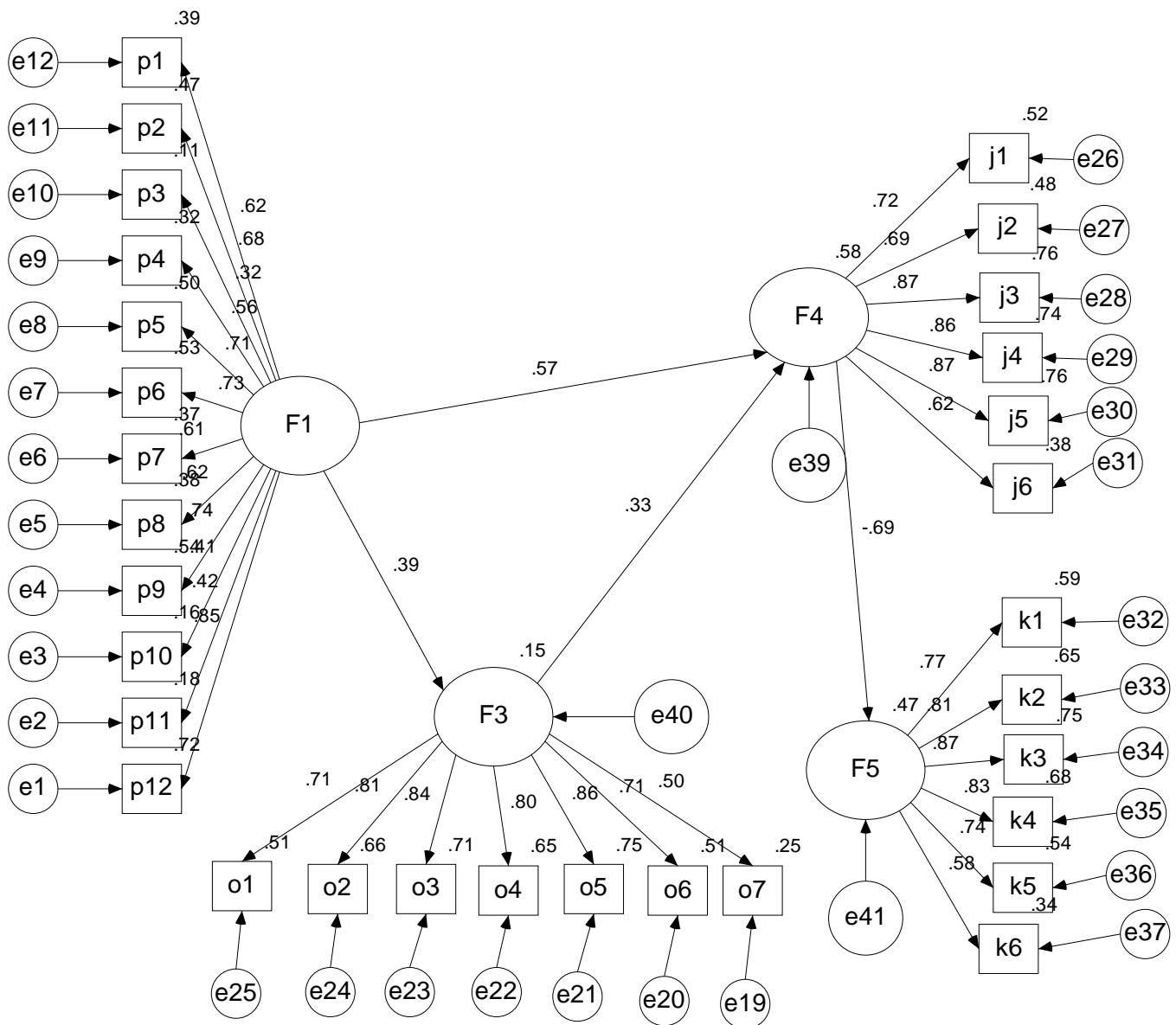


Figure 1: The structural model for the hypothesized model

The model fit indexes for the structural model above is $\chi^2/df= 1.702$; GFI = 0.751; AGFI = 0.713; CFI= 0.875; RMSEA=0.073. The model fit indexes suggest that the structural model above represented a moderately good model fit to the data because of the values of CFI of 0.875 or approximately 0.90 met the recommended cutoff point of 0.90, the value of $\chi^2/df= 1.702$ was below the recommended value of 3 and the value of RMSEA=0.073 was below the recommended value of 0.085 (Byrne, 2001; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004; Hair et al., 2006). However, the value of GFI = 0.751 and AGFI = 0.713 were still below the recommended cutoff point of 0.90. In sum, the model fit indexes suggest that structural model B represented a moderately good model fit to the data.

The assumption of normality was also checked for all the variables in the best fitting structural model B and it was discovered that the skewness and kurtosis values for the variables were below the recommended value of 3 and 10 respectively (Kline, 2005). Hence, the distribution of all the variables did not demonstrate significant departure from normality. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, all the paths in the best fitting structural model B were significant at the 0.05 level, namely, between POS and felt obligation and the standardized regression weights was 0.39; between POS and affective commitment and the standardized regression weights was 0.57; felt obligation and affective commitment and the standardized regression weights was 0.33; affective commitment and turnover intention and the standardized regression weights was -0.69. The next step was to run the confirmatory factor analysis on the measurement model for the best fitting model to assess the degree of discriminant validity for the constructs of the best fitting structural model. The measurement model for the best fitting structural model is represented in Figure 2 below.

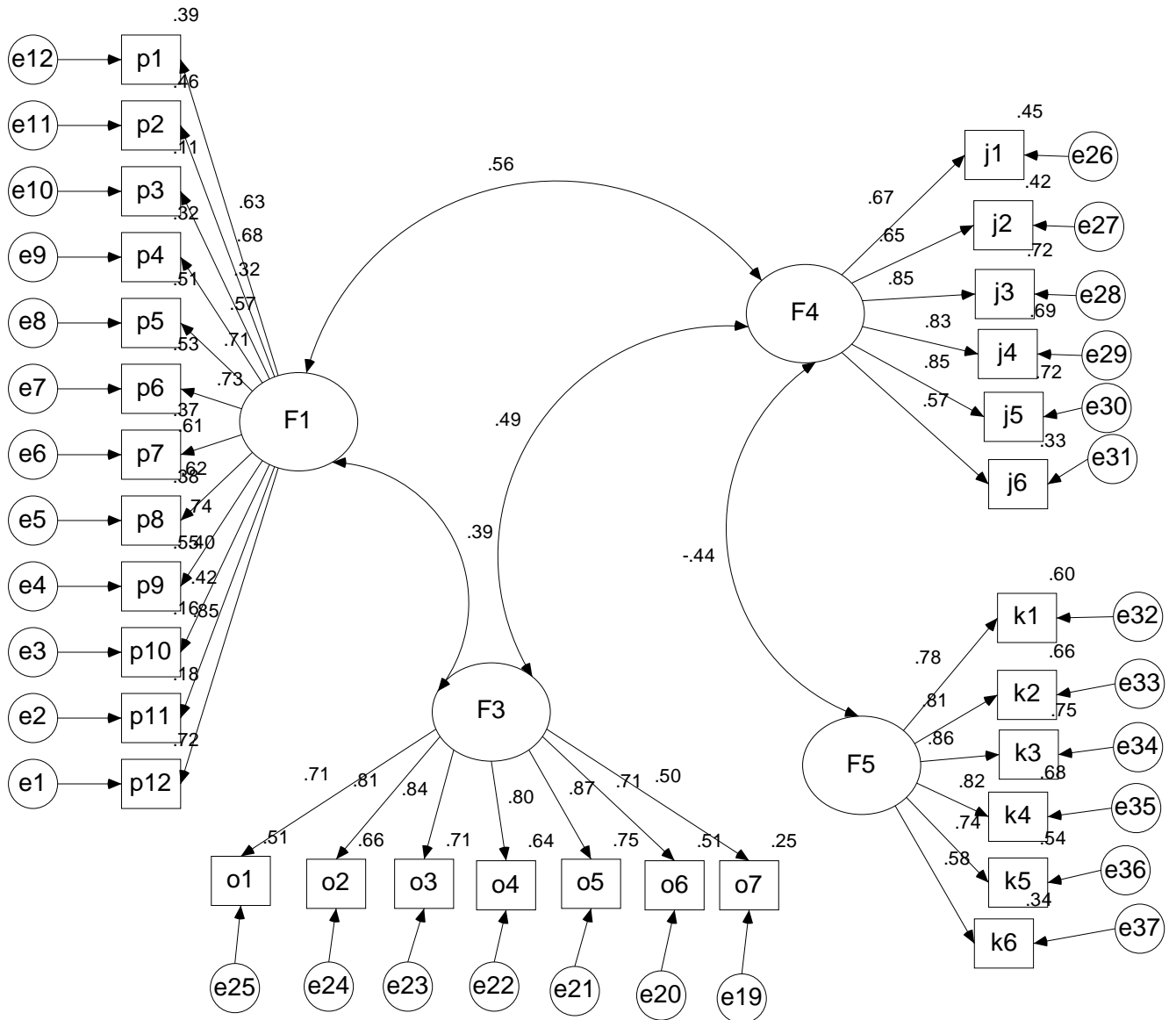


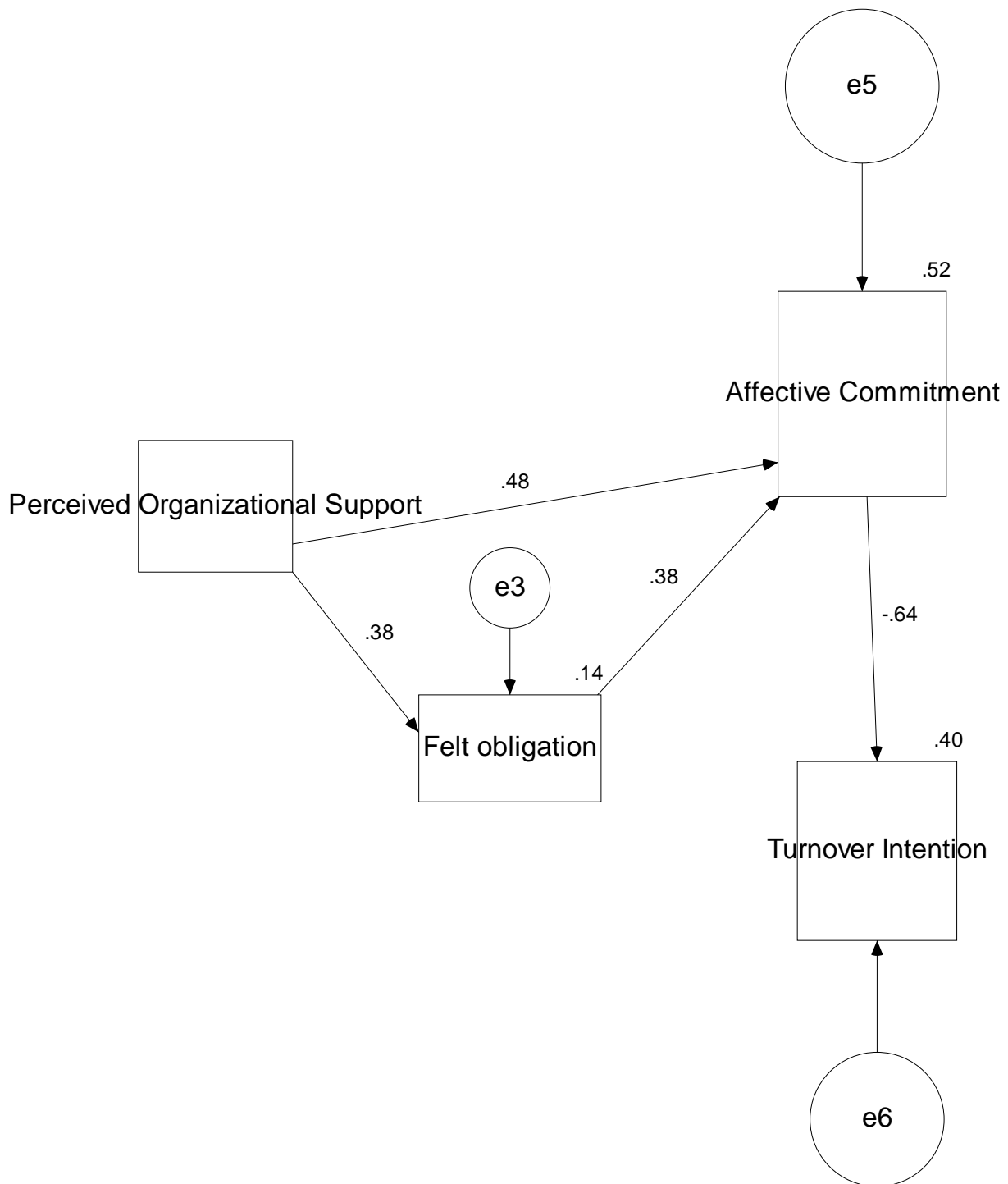
Figure 2: The measurement model

The confirmatory factor analysis suggested a moderately good model fit for the measurement model: $\chi^2/df = 1.794$; GFI = 0.743; AGFI = 0.703; CFI = 0.858; RMSEA = 0.077. This is because the values of CFI of 0.858 or approximately 0.90 met the recommended cutoff point of 0.90, the value of $\chi^2/df = 1.794$ was below the recommended value of 3 and the value of RMSEA = 0.077 was below the recommended value of 0.085. However, the value of GFI = 0.743 and AGFI = 0.703 were still below the recommended cutoff point of 0.90. Furthermore, compared to the one factor model or the Harman's 1 factor model whereby all the indicators of the best fitting structural model were loaded in a single factor ($\chi^2/df = 3.357$; CFI = 0.575; RMSEA = 0.133); the measurement model was a significant improvement, indicating that there were significant relationships among the latent constructs in the structural model. In the measurement model, none of the indicators cross-loaded on other factors and all the indicators loaded significantly ($p < 0.001$) onto their respective latent factors. As a result, the concern of common method error was minimized. Thus, the 4-factor measurement model is confirmed and the examination of the best fitting structural model B is valid and justified (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

To further confirm the discriminant validity of the constructs in the best fitting structural model, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was also conducted on the scale items used to measure the 4 constructs in the structural model B, namely POS, felt obligation, affective commitment and turnover intention. A total of 31 indicators were entered into the analysis, and 7 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 emerged, explaining almost 70% of the variance of the indicators. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.888 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (chi-square = 2630.249, $p < 0.001$), indicating sufficient inter-correlations among the indicators and the appropriateness of the factor analysis to be performed (Hair et al., 2006). Even though seven factors emerged instead of four factors, the results of the EFA test indicate that the indicators used to measure the 4 constructs in the structural model B did not tend to load on a single factor, thus the concern of common method error was minimized.

The best fitting structural model B was also transformed into a path model, whereby the constructs of the model were measured by a single indicator which is the mean scores to check the model fit of the path model. The path model is represented in Figure 3 below:-

FIGURE 3: PATH MODEL FOR THE STRUCTURAL MODEL



The model fit indexes for path model above is $\chi^2/df= 1.561$; GFI = 0.989; AGFI = 0.943; CFI= 0.994; RMSEA=0.065. The model fit indexes suggest that path model which represented the best fitting structural model represented a good model fit to the data because the values of CFI, GFI and AGFI exceeded the recommended cutoff point of 0.90, the value of $\chi^2/df= 1.561$ was below the recommended value of 3 and the value of RMSEA=0.065 was below the recommended value of 0.085. Moreover, all the path estimates for the path model were significant at the 0.001 level. Hence, the model fit indexes of the path model which represented the best fitting structural model suggest that structural model represented a good model fit to the data.

DISCUSSION

This study supported a moderately fit best fitting structural model which included the interrelationships between four constructs, namely POS, felt obligation, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that individuals who receive favorable treatments from others are likely to return the other party's favour based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) further proposes that in the employee-employer exchange relationship, employees who believe that they have received high levels of support from the organization tend to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors that benefit the organization. This study suggest that POS has not only a direct influence on organizational commitment, but also an indirect impact via felt obligation. However, the influence of POS on turnover intention is only through the indirect effect via affective organizational commitment.

POS was found to have both a direct impact on affective organizational commitment ($\beta=0.57$), and an indirect impact mediated by felt obligation. As Eisenberger et al. (1986) pointed out, POS represents employees' beliefs in the organization's commitment to them, and thus employees with higher POS would repay the organization with stronger commitment to the organization. In addition, higher levels of POS create a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate the organization's support by caring about the organization's well being and helping achieve its objectives (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Thus, affective organizational commitment which refers to an individual's identification with and involvement in the employing organization (Porter et al., 1974), may also stem from such a sense of felt obligation. While this mediating process plays a partial role, test of alternative models suggests that felt obligation did not fully mediate the effect of POS on affective organizational commitment. Rather, POS, which represents employees' belief in the organization's commitment to them, has a direct positive impact on the employees' organizational commitment.

Contrary to the prediction, POS has a insignificant direct effect on employees' turnover intention at the 0.05 level. The magnitude of the negative relationship was very weak at -0.17. Thus, the findings of this study is inconsistent with the findings of previous research such as Wayne et al. (1997) and Eisenberger et al. (2001) which had proven the negative relationship between POS and turnover intention.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) suggest that employees who perceive high levels of support from their organization are inclined to repay the organization. This study suggests that the academicians will repay the organizations who supported them with stronger commitment to the organization and developing a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate the organization's support by caring about the organization's well being and helping achieve its objectives (Eisenberger et al., 2001). However, the academicians will not repay the organizations by maintaining membership in the organization, which means they may still have desire to leave the organization though the organization has supported them.

Consistent with previous research, this study supported the relationship that lower commitment to the organization may lead to increased intention to quit (for example, Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Chughtai and Zafar, 2006, Mohamed et al., 2006) with a $\beta=-0.7$. Further, affective organizational commitment fully mediated the relationship between POS and turnover intention.

These findings above, in combination, suggest that employees who perceive higher levels of POS developed stronger commitment to the organization and as a result, were less likely to leave their organization. In other words, the influence of POS on turnover intention is only

through the indirect effect via affective organizational commitment, which is consistent with the findings of Mohamed et al. (2006).

This study, along with Eisenberger et al. (2001), provides empirical support for organizational support theory's (Eisenberger et al., 1986) contention that POS induces positive work attitudes and behaviors based on the norm of reciprocity. However, results of this study suggested that felt obligation mediates the effects of POS on variables such as affective organizational commitment, but not other variables such as turnover intention. It is possible that the sense of felt obligation may be very important in influencing employees' organizational behaviour during their continued membership or tenure in the organization. The employees' decisions as to whether to stay in the organization may be more influenced by their affective attitudes towards to the organization, which is their level of affective commitment to the organization and alternative employment opportunities available. It is important for future studies to focus more on this concept of felt obligation in studying social exchange relationships, and further determine for which outcome variables felt obligation may play an important role such as employee's performance and organizational citizenship behaviours.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several limitations of this study that need to be mentioned. First, this study is cross-sectional in nature. As the data was collected at the same time, the causal inferences on the hypothesized relationship should be made in caution. However, the use of the structural equation modeling to analyze the data has to a certain extent, minimized this problem as this method allows for the simultaneous evaluation of the path model as a whole.

Second, all the variables of the study were measured by survey instruments and responded by the employees. Hence, to reduce common-method bias which arise when both explanatory and dependent variable information is collected from the single data source and in the same process (Tansky & Cohen, 2001), data were collected from four private universities and confirmatory factor analysis was used to test for content validity of the constructs (Pare & Tremblay, 2007).

The Harman's 1 factor model whereby all the indicators of the best fitting structural model B were loaded in a single factor ($\chi^2/df= 3.357$; CFI= 0.575; RMSEA= 0.133) was compared to the measurement model of the best fitting structural model. The results suggest that the measurement model of the best fitting structural model showed a significant improvement in terms of model fit to the data, indicating that there were significant relationships among the latent constructs in the structural model B (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). In the measurement model, none of the indicators cross-loaded on other factors and all the indicators loaded significantly ($p<0.001$) onto their respective latent factors. As a result, the concern of common method error was minimized. Moreover, Gould-Williams (2007) also commended that the magnitude of the over-estimation effect as a result of common-method bias is not as large as once thought and the option of using supervisory ratings would introduce a different set of limitations which includes 'halo' effects ie. positive or negative bias based on a particular employee characteristics that obscures the supervisors' ability to assess actual employees' behavior fairly.

Thirdly, the findings of this study were confined to the academicians working with the private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia and may not be generalized to academicians working with private institutions of higher learning overseas, public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia as well as other industries.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has contributed to the literature in at least the following ways.

This study has provided further empirical evidence and validates the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and specifically in the aspect of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) in the employer-employee relationship, by investigating the possible mediating role of felt obligation in the POS- work outcomes relationship. Examination of the mediating role of felt obligation, helps to understand the process through which POS influences employee attitudes and behaviors.

This study suggest that POS has not only a direct influence on organizational commitment, but also an indirect impact via felt obligation. This finding confirms the predictions of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) that the academicians will repay the universities which supported them with stronger commitment to the organization and developing a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate the organization's support by caring about the organization's well being and helping achieve its objectives (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

This study has also answered the call by Lee and Peccei (2007) for more studies that examined the processes that underlie the relationship of POS and affective commitment by investigated the mechanism through which POS influences affective commitment such as felt obligation.

It was found that the academics who were more committed to the universities may have less intention to leave which is consistent with the findings of past research such as Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Chughtai and Zafar, 2006, Mohamed et al., 2006). Further, affective organizational commitment fully mediated the relationship between POS and turnover intention. In other words, the academicians who perceive that the universities were supportive of them would be committed to the universities and as a result, would be less likely to leave the universities.

The findings supported the notion that the degree to which the individuals are committed to their profession has an impact on a variety of important organizational outcomes such as affective organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac , 1990; Meyer at al., 1993; Wallace, 1993; Lee at al., 2000 Cetin, 2006; Mohamed et al., 2006).

In sum, this study contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the psychological processes underlying the formation of organizational commitment through the perspectives of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In particular, this study has contributed to the gap in the organizational commitment literature as mentioned by Oliver (1990) who has likened the study of organizational commitment to a "black box" in which various individual and organizational factors determine commitment levels and in turn affect certain behaviors, with scant attention to what happens "in between".

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study sheds some light on the effective management of employees in general, and academicians in particular. First of all, as higher levels of POS are related either directly or indirectly to a variety of positive work outcomes such as affective organizational commitment and turnover intention, organizations should find ways to promote higher POS beliefs among employees. Results of this study can help to guide this endeavor.

This study suggests that the academicians will repay the universities which supported them with stronger commitment to the organization and developing a sense of felt obligation to reciprocate the organization's support by caring about the organization's well being and helping achieve its objectives. Hence, organizations should always recognize the academicians' contributions and care for their well being in order to achieve the organizations' mission of being world class universities delivering high quality teaching and producing high impact research outputs.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper presents important contributions to the literature, especially its aims of providing new empirical evidence to support the social exchange theory and organizational support theory in the context of the Malaysian private higher education industry and to find the best fitting structural model which included the interrelationships between four constructs, namely POS, felt obligation, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. Besides, it justifies the importance of creating a team of committed academics working for the private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia to realize the strategic mission of enhancing the image of Malaysia as a global hub for high quality higher education in this region.

REFERENCES

- Alderfer, C.P. (1972). *Existence, relatedness, and growth*, New York: Free Press.
- Allen, D.G., Shore, L.M., & Griffeth, R.W. (2003). The role of perceived organizational support and supportive human resource practices in the turnover process. *Journal of Management*, 29:99-118.
- Agarwala, T. (2003). Innovative human resource practices and organizational commitment: an empirical investigation, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(2), 175-197.
- Anderson, J.C., & Gerbing, D.W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103: 411-423.
- Anon. (2006). Taking Sarawak to the next level. *The Borneo Post*, p. 1.
- Atan, H. (2007, August 28). Aiming higher: PM maps out plan for world-class varsities. *The New Straits Times*, p. 1.
- Bartol, K.M. (1979). Professionalization as a predictor of organizational commitment, role stress, and turnover: A multidimensional approach. *Academy of Management Journal*, 22: 815-521.
- Becker, B.E., & Gerhart, B. (1996). The impact of human resource management on organizational performance: Progress and prospects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39: 779-801.
- Blau, P.M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York: Wiley.
- Capelleras, J. (2005). Attitudes of academic staff towards their job and organization: An empirical assessment. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11, 147-166.
- Cetin, M.O. (2006). The relationship between job satisfaction, occupational and organizational commitment of academics. *The Journal of American Academy of Business*, 8(1), 78-88.
- Chang, E. (1999). Career commitment as a Complex Moderator of organizational commitment and turnover intention. *Human Relations*, 52(10), 1257-1278.
- Cheng, W.L. (2001). SEM being more effective than multiple regression in parsimonious model testing for management development research. *Journal of Management Development*, 20(7): 650-667.
- Chughtai, A.A. & Zafar, S. (2006). Antecedents and Consequences of Organizational Commitment among Pakistani university teachers. *Applied H.R.M. Research*, 11(1), 39-64.
- Coombs, G. Jr., & Gomez-Mejia, L.R. (1991). Cross-functional pay strategies in high-technology firms. *Compensation and Benefits Review*, 23(5): 40-48.
- Delaney, J. T., & Huselid, M.A. (1996). The impact of human resources management practices on perceptions of organizational performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39: 949-969.

- Delery, J.E. (1998). Issues of fit in strategic human resource management: Implications for research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 8: 289-310.
- Delery, J.E., & Doty, H.D. (1996). Modes of theorizing in strategic human resource management: Tests of universalistic, contingency, and configurational performance predictions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39: 802-835.
- Drucker, P.F. (1999). Knowledge worker productivity: The biggest challenge. *California Management Review*, 41(2): 79-107.
- Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., Rexwinkel, B., Lynch, P.D., & Rhoades, L. (2001). Reciprocation of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 42-51.
- Eisenberger, R., Cummings, J., Armeli, S., & Lynch, P. (1997). Perceived organizational support, discretionary treatment, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82: 812-820.
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., and Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, 500-507.
- Eisenberger, R., Fasolo, P., and Davis-LaMastro, V. (1990). Perceived organizational support, employee diligence, commitment, and innovation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, 51-59.
- Eisenberger, R., Stinglhamber, F., Vandenberghe, C., Sucharski, I., & Rhoades, L. (2002). Perceived supervisor support: Contributions to perceived organizational support and employee retention. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87: 565-573.
- Fuller, J.B., Hester, K., Barnett, T., Frey, L. & Relyea, C. (2006). Perceived organizational support and perceived external prestige (PEP): predicting organizational attachment for university faculty, staff and administrators. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 146(3), 327-347.
- Garavan, T.N., Morley, M., Gunnigle, P. and Collins, E. (2001), Human capital accumulation: the role of human resource development. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25, 48-68.
- Guoldner, A.W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25: 161-178.
- Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J., Anderson, R.E., & Tatham, R.L. (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis*, 6th Ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. pp. 741-742.
- Hislop, D. (2003). Linking human resource management and knowledge management via commitment. *Employee Relations*, 25(2): 182-202.
- Humphreys, M. and Hoque, K. (2007). Have the lecturers lost their voice? Involvement and participation in the devolved Further Education sector. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(7): 1199-1213.
- Huselid, M.A. (1995). The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity, and corporate financial performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38: 635-672.
- Iles, P., Mabey, C. and Robertson, I. (1990). HRM Practices and Employee Commitment: Possibilities, Pitfalls and Paradoxes. *British Journal of Management*, 1, 147-157.
- Joiner, T. & Bakalis, S. (2006). The antecedents of organizational commitment: the case of Australian casual academics. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(6): 439-452.
- Khoo, H.A. (1981). From classroom to the boardroom. *Malaysian Business*, 18-22.

- Kinicki, A.J., Carson, K.P. and Bohlander, G.W. (1992). Relationship between an Organization's Actual Human Resource Efforts and Employee Attitudes. *Group & Organization Management*, 17(2), 135-152.
- Kline, R.B. (2005). *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling*, 2nd Ed. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Kumar, N. and Idris, K. (2006). An examination of educational institutions' knowledge performance. *The Learning Organization*, 13(1), 96-116.
- Landau, J., & Hammer, T.H. (1986). Clerical employees' perceptions of intraorganizational career opportunities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 29: 385-404.
- Lavelle, J.J., Rupp, D.E., & Brockner, J. (2007). Taking a multifoci approach to the study of justice, social exchange and citizenship behavior: The target similarity model. *Journal of Management*, 33(6): 841-866.
- Lee, J. & Peccei, R. (2007). Perceived organizational support and affective commitment: the mediating role of organizational- based self-esteem in the context of job insecurity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28: 661-685.
- Lee, K., Carswell, J.J., & Allen, N.J. (2000). A meta-analytic review of occupational commitment: Relations with person-and work-related variables. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85: 799-811.
- Mathieu, J.E. and Zajaz, D.M. (1990). A review and meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates and consequences of organizational commitment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 171-194.
- Meyer, J.P., & Allen, N.J. (1997). *Commitment in the Workplace: Theory, Research and Application*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Meyer, J.P., Allen, N.J., & Smith, C.A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 78(4): 538-551.
- Meyer, J.P. & Smith, C.A. (2001). HRM Practices and Organizational Commitment: Test of a Mediation Model. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 17(4), 319-331.
- Mohamed, F., Taylor, G.S., & Hassan, A. (2006). Affective commitment and intent to quit: The impact of work and non-work related issues. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 18: 512- 529.
- Mohd. Nasurdin, A., Ramayah, T., Abdullah, Hemdi, M. & Seow, L.V. (2003). Job Satisfaction and turnover intention: A study among academicians. In *Proceedings of the 5th Asian Academy of Management Conference, Kuantan, Malaysia*, pp. 229-236.
- Morrow, P. (1983). Concept redundancy in organizational research: The case of work commitment. *Academy of Management Review*, 8, 486-500.
- Mowday, R.T., Steers, R.M., & Porter, L.W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 14: 224-247.
- Ogilvie, J.R. (1986). The Role of Human Resource Management Practices in Predicting Organizational Commitment. *Group & Organization Studies*, 11(4), 335-359.
- Oliver, N. (1990). Rewards, investments, alternatives, and organizational commitment: Empirical evidence and theoretical development. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 19-31.
- Pare, G. & Tremblay, M. (2007). The influence of high-involvement human resources practices, procedural justice, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors on information technology professionals' turnover intentions. *Group & Organization Management*, 32: 326-357.
- Porter, L.H., Steers, R. M., & Boulian P.V. (1974). Organizational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover among psychiatric technicians. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 59(5): 603-609.
- Ramachandran, S. and Foo, H. (2007, November 3). Public universities fail outstanding test. *New Straits Times*, p. 6.

- Reichers, A.E. (1985). A review and reconceptualization of organizational commitment. *The Academy of Management Review*, 10 (3), 465-476.
- Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87: 698-714.
- Rhoades, L., Eisenberger, R., & Armeli, S. (2001). Affective commitment to the organization: The contribution of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 825-836.
- Rowley, J. (1996). Motivation and academic staff in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 4(3), 11-18.
- Setton, R.P., Bennet, N., & Liden, R.C. (1996). Social exchange in organizations: Perceived organizational support, leader-member exchange, and employee reciprocity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81: 219-227.
- Shore, L.M., Tetrick, L.E., Lynch, P., & Barksdale, K. (2006). Social and economic exchange: Construct development and validation. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(4): 837-867.
- Shore, L.M., & Wayne, S.J. (1993). Commitment and employee behavior: Comparison of affective commitment and continuance commitment with perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78: 774-780.
- Smeenk, S.G.A., Eisinga, R.N., Teelken, J.C. & Doorewaard, J.A.C.M. (2006). The effects of HRM practices and antecedents on organizational commitment among university employees. *Journal of Human Resources Management*, 17: 2035-2054.
- Snell, S.A., & Dean, J.W. (1992). Integrated manufacturing and human resource management: A human capital perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35: 467-504.
- Tan, F.M. (2008). Linking Career development practices to turnover intention: The mediator of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Business and Public Affairs*, 2(1), 1-20.
- Tansky, J.W. & Cohen, D.J. (2001). The relationship between organizational support, employee development, and organization commitment: An empirical study. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 12: 285-300.
- Testa, M.R. (2001). Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction and Effort in the Service Environment. *Journal of Psychology*, 13(2): 226-236.
- Tight, M. (2003). *Researching Higher Education*, 1st Ed. Glasgow: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Tsui, A.S., Pearce, J.L., Porter, L.W. and Tripoli, A.M. (1997). Alternative approaches to the employee-organization relationship: Does investment in employees pay off?, *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5), 1089-1121.
- Tuma, B.N., & Grimes, A.J. (1981). A comparison of models of role orientations of professionals in a research-oriented university. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26: 187-206.
- Uda Nagu, S. (2007, October 21). International students: Facing new realities. *The Sunday Times, Learning Curve*, p. 2.
- Wallace, J.E. (1993). Professional and organizational commitment: Compatible or incompatible? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 42: 333-349.
- Wayne, S.J., Shore, L.M., & Liden, R.C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40: 82-111.
- Wayne, S.J., Shore, L.M., Bommer, W.H., & Tetrick, L.E. (2002). The role of fair treatment and rewards in perceptions of organizational support and leader-member exchange. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87: 590-598.
- Whitener, E.M. (2001). Do "high commitment" human resource practices affect employee commitment? A cross-level analysis using hierarchical linear modeling. *Journal of Management*, 27, 515-535.

- Yusof, A.A. & Shamsuri, N.A. (2006). Organizational justice as a determinant of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Malaysian Management Review*, 41(1): 48-62.
- Wayne, S.J., Shore, L.M., & Liden, R.C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40: 82-111.