THE MEDIATION ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING ORGANIZATIONDIMENSION AND
PERCEIVED KNOWLEDGE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

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Specially Dedicated to

My kind Relatives

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is now in the new era of K-based economy, and global competition has emerged as an important issue. For Malaysia to attain its goal, it is a necessity for all organizations, including public and private organizations to be concerned with the better performance in regard to global competitiveness. Malaysia's universities, particularly research universities are not excluded from this matter. These universities need to seek new strategies that empower them to survive, and one of these strategies is learning organization. To date, there is no research that has ever investigated the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement. The objective of this research is to investigate the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement in five public research universities (UTM, UM, UPM, UKM, USM) in Malaysia from the clerical staff perception. The method of this study is quantitative survey and the instrument is adopted from short form of Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) which was asserted by Yang, Watkins and Marsick (1993). The method of quantitative data collection was conducted through paper based survey. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to analyze the data. The sample for this study is drawn through probability sampling while stratified random sampling is chosen for selecting the respondents. This study found learning organization and organizational commitment have positive significant relationship with perceived knowledge performance. The organizational commitment acts as a mediator between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance. The results of the research strengthen the concept of the relation between organizational commitment and learning organization.

ABSTRAK

Sekarang Malaysia berada dalam era baru yang berasaskan ekonomi pengetahuan, di mana persaingan secara global telah muncul sebagai isu yang penting. Bagi mencapai matlamat tersebut, ia menjadi satu keperluan untuk semua organisasi termasuk organisasi awam dan swasta untuk mengambil berat tentang prestasi yang lebih baik dalam hal berkaitan dengan daya saing global. Universiti penyelidikan tidak terkecuali dalam hal ini. Universiti perlu mencari strategi baru bagi mengekalkan kedudukan prestasi mereka. Salah satu dari strategi ini adalah menerapkan organisasi pembelajaran. Setakat ini belum ada penyelidikan yang telah menyiasat peranan pengantaraan komitmen organisasi dalam hubungan di antara organisasi pembelajaran dan prestasi peningkatan pengetahuan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat peranan pengantaraan komitmen organisasi dalam hubungan di antara organisasi pembelajaran dan prestasi peningkatan pengetahuan di lima universiti penyelidikan awam (UTM, UM, UPM, UKM, USM) di Malaysia dari segi persepsi kakitangan perkeranian. Kaedah kajian ini merupakan kajian kuantitatif dan instrumen ini diadaptasikan dari ringkasan Soal-selidik Dimensi Organisasi Pembelajaran (DLOQ) yang telah disarankan oleh Yang Watkins dan Marsick (1993). Kaedah pengumpulan data kuantitatif telah dijalankan melalui pengedaran borang soal selidik. Pakej Statistik untuk Sains Sosial (SPSS) dan Permodelan Persamaan Struktural (SEM) telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Sampel kajian ini diambil melalui hasil kajian kebarangkalian manakala persampelan rawak berstrata digunakan untuk memilih responden. Kajian ini mendapati organisasi pembelajaran dan komitmen organisasi mempunyai korelasi yang positif dengan prestasi peningkatan pengetahuan. Kajian ini mendapati adanya peranan pengantaraan komitmen organisasi dalam hubungan di antara organisasi pembelajaran dan prestasi peningkatan pengetahuan. Hasil dari kajian ini akan mengukuhkan konsep hubungan di antara komitmen organisasi dan organisasi pembelajaran.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE   -   Average Variance Extracted

CL   -   Continuous Learning

CR   -   Composite Reliability

CT   -   Collaboration in Team

DLOQ   -   Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire

GLCs   -   Government-Linked Companies

HRD   -   Human Resource Development

E   -   Empowerment

ICT   -   Communication Technology

ICT   -   Information and Communication Technology

ID   -   Inquiry and Dialogue

INTAN   -   The National Institute of Public Administration

IPT   -   Local Institutions of Higher Learning

IPTA   -   Public Institutions of Higher Learning

IPTS   -   Private Institutions of Higher Learning

ITM   -   Institut Teknologi Mara

KP   -   Perceived Knowledge Performance Improvement

KPT   -   Ministry of Higher Learning

LO   -   Learning Organization Culture

NDP   -   National Development Policy

NEP   -   New Economic Policy

NVP   -   National Vision Policy

OC   -   Organizational Commitment

OCA   -   Affective Commitment

OCC   -   Continuance Commitment

OCN   -   Normative Commitment

OPP	-	Outline Perspective Plan
PHEIs	-	Initial Concern of Both Private
PSPTN	-	National Higher Education Strategic Plan
OCQ	-	Organizational Commitment Questionnaire
OCS	-	Organizational Commitment Survey
R& D	-	Human Resources Development
R & D	-	Research and Development
S& D	-	Science and Technology
S & T	-	Science and Technology
SC	-	System Connection
SL	-	Strategic Leadership
ST	-	System to Capture Learning
THES	-	Times Higher Education Supplement
UDM	-	Darul Iman University of Malaysia
UIAM	-	International Islamic University Malaysia
UiTM	-	Mara University of Technology
UKM	-	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UKM	-	University of Malaysia Kelantan
UM	-	University of Malaysia
UMP	-	University of Malaysia Pahang
UMS	-	University of Malaysia Sabah
UMT	-	University of Malaysia Terengganu
UniMAP	-	University of Malaysia Perlis
UNIMAS	-	University of Malaysia Sarawak
UPM	-	Putra University of Malaysia
UPNM	-	National Defence University of Malaysia
UPR	-	Public Research Universities
UPSI	-	Sultan Idris University Of Education
USIM	-	Islamic Science University of Malaysia
USM	-	Science University of Malaysia
UTeM	-	University of Technical Malaysia Melaka
UTHM	-	Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia
UTM	-	Teknologi Universiti of Malaysia
UUM	-	Northern University of Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The significance of learning was first stated by the Chinese philosopher, Confucius (551-479BC). He believed that everyone would and should benefit from learning. Although the concept of learning organization has been discussed for almost twenty years, for instance the concept was studied by Hayes and Abernathy (1980) in the USA, and Pedler *et al.* (1988) in Britain, the roots of learning organization can be traced back to the 1950s and the 1960s (Johnson, 2002) to the study of Cyert and March (1963) and Cangelosi and Dill (1965), and recently the study of Song *et al.* (2013), Watkins and O' Neil (2013), Marsick (2013), Watkins Song and Chermack (2008), Tynjaia (2008), and Jensen (2005). The terms organizational learning and learning organization are sometimes used interchangeably. However, organizational learning is a concept applied to explain the certain types of activity that take place in the organization while a learning organization refers to the organization itself (Tsang, 1997). Pedler *at al.* (1991) defined learning organization as "an organization that facilitates the learning of all of its members and continuously transforms itself in order to meet its strategic goals" (p.27). From the integrative approach, learning organization is defined as "an organization that is characterized by continuous learning for continuous improvement, and by the capacity to transform itself" (Watkins and Marsick 1993, 1996, p. 93-94).

Organizations confront unpredictable changes and fluctuating environment due to the information age, knowledge economy and technological progression, so the best way for organizations to maintain competitive advantage is getting ready to adapt, change and improve (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005; Joo, 2007). Organizations continuously search for new strategies to ensure their organizational success or survival. The organizational learning is the strategy for organizations to adapt to the turbulent change (Pfeffer, 1994). In today's highly globalized world, the organizations need to adapt to the turbulent change and the universities which are the origin of knowledge have no exception.

The key elements of learning and change process are vital for transforming universities from traditional forms into reformed and developmental ones, and for creating opportunities which are necessary for improvement in performance capacity and constant renewal (Gilley and Maycunich, 2000). Regarding changing Malaysia into knowledge-based economy and meeting the mounting demand for new skills and knowledge, it is important that Malaysian universities continuously adapt to increasingly competitive environments, nurturing learning, and continuously developing the capacities to sustain the lifelong learning (Ujang, 2009, p.37).

1.2   Background

1.2.1   The Evolution of Higher Learning in Malaysia

Since the focus of this study is on public research universities in Malaysia, it is important that the evolution of higher learning from early stage to globalized phase be discussed. In the recent decade education has became the axis of attention for Malaysia's National Mission as its significance was written in the National Education Philosophy (Ujang, 2009, p.43):

"Education in Malaysia is a constant effort towards the growth of individual potential in a comprehensive and integrated way so as to create a balanced and harmonious person in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects,

based on a trust and obedience to God. This effort is for the purpose of creating Malaysians who are knowledgeable, responsible and capable of attaining well-being as well as contributing to the harmony and peace of society and nation."

The rapid growth which has taken place in the last ten years has exceeded the entire forty years of growth that had occurred before, which can be seen in increasing the number of local Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT), increasing in number of students and new courses, as well as the establishment of Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS). This trend started during the financial crisis of 1997 when thousands of Malaysians students abroad had to be placed at local Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT). The government increased the number of students in Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA), and pays more attention to Private Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTS) to provide courses at the degree level. This rapid development was the result of the governmental policies, the National Mission and the 9MP (Ninth Malaysia Plan) towards a proactive higher learning sector (Ujang, 2009, p.48).

For transforming the local institutions of higher learning to become more competitive and to act as the channel to increase capacity building, human capital and knowledge excellence as the previous Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdulah Ahmad Badawi's wished, the Ministry of Higher Learning (KPT) succeeded in submitted the draft of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan which was launched on 27th August 2007. The Strategic Plan serves the purpose of bringing great changes to the national higher learning system. Its impact was focused on enhancing academic productivity in terms of research, publications, and internationalization that have placed the local Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT) on the map of higher learning destinations at the international level. In addition, the government's commitment was apparent in the form of allocation amounting to 18.4 billion RM in the Ninth Malaysian Plan, especially for the higher learning sector which was 50 percent higher than the allocation during the term of the Eight Malaysian Plan (Ujang, 2009, p.57).

From the historical perspective, the development of higher learning in Malaysia started since the pre-independence era. It was pioneered by the Malaysian educated who got their higher education abroad, in Western Asia or England before returning home to develop secondary level and college education. Traditional religious schools (sekolah) and *Madrasah* were set up by groups of *ulama* that received higher education in Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Ujang, 2009, p.47).

This development became more apparent in the post-independence period. In this period of time the focus of higher education changed in line with the country's stage of development: from providing diploma and bachelor degree programmes at the early stage of the establishment of local university at the end of the 1960s to advanced degree programmes at the end of the 1980s.

According to Ujang (2009), Chang Da (2007), Haji Ahmad (1998), and Grapragasem *et al*. (2014) the development of institutions of higher learning in the post-independence era can be divided into four phases, namely:

a) Early phase. Focused on providing institutions and facilities to meet the needs of human capital in a Particular field. This phase was directed at courses like human science, administration, professional and teaching through the establishment of the Kula Lumpur campus of UM on 1st January, 1962, and University Science of Malaysia (USM) in 1969.

b) Expansion phase. The focus was to fulfill the objectives of the national development policy such as in terms of Bumi putera participation in various sections and providing higher learning facilities using various finance models, including private fund and government-linked companies (GLCs). This phase was implemented through the establishment of Agriculture University of Malaysia (Universiti Pertanian Malaysia or UPM) on 29th October, 1971, National University Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Makaysai or UKM) on 18th May, 1970, MARA Institute of Technology (Institut Teknologi MARA or ITM) on 14th October, 1967, and UTM on 1st

April, 1975. Other universities and institutions of higher learning (Institusi Pengajian Tinggi or IPTs) at various levels were also established by taking into account various factors and backgrounds, such as provincial development and educational focus. Then the existence of the private institutions of higher learning (Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Swasta or IPTS) appeared at the end of the 1990s.

c) Consolidation phase. This phase of providing education at the level of undergraduate learning which started at the end of 1980s. This phase was important because during this time the undergraduate programmes started on a large scale basis in Malaysia, submitting the policy of sending students abroad in almost all disciplines of knowledge at the level of advanced degree, which was previously practiced since the early 1970s. This is now very apparent among academics at the local universities that require an advanced degree as a condition of service.

d) Globalization phase. This phase was framed as such to enable higher learning institutions in Malaysia to be compared at the international level. Specifically, this phase was reordered in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (Pelan Strategik Pengajian Tinggi Negara or PSPTN) towards strengthening quality and visibility in terms of the quality of higher learning and intellectual development as a whole.

All four phases had been framed and implemented in line with the national development plan according to the progress of the time and socio-economic background. In this matter, the most apparent improvement in terms of the establishment of new institutions was during the expansion phase, which was an implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (Ujang, 2009, p.77).

Malaysia actually has succeeded in its endeavors for supporting higher education and generating graduates who have the ability to meet the needs of human resource capital for its economic growth in the last three decades. As of now, there are 20 public higher education institutions, consisting of (4) comprehensive

universities, (12) focused universities and (5) research universities. The brief definitions for each university are as follows (Ujang, 2009, p.87):

1. Comprehensive universities: These universities propose different fields of study for all status of education including pre-undergraduate, undergraduate, and post graduate degrees. These are Mara University of Technology (UiTM), University of Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), International Islamic University Malaysia (UIAM), University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

2. Focused universities: These universities concentrate on particular fields such as technical, management, education and defense. Northern University of Malaysia (UUM), University of Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI), Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia (UTHM), University of Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), University of Technical Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), Darul Iman University of Malaysia (UDM), National Defense University of Malaysia (UPNM), University of Malaysia Kelantan (UKM), Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM), University of Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) are in this type of university.

3. Research universities: These universities concentrate on research activities and teaching based on research, development, and commercialisation (R & D & C). These universities include of the following five public universities: University of Malaysia (UM), National University of Malaysia (UKM), Teknologi Universiti of Malaysia (UTM), Putra University of Malaysia (UPM), Science University of Malaysia (USM).

Research universities in Malaysia are public universities identified by the cabinet on 11th October 2006 to become distinguished educational and research hub. It is expected that the recognition granted to these five universities of Malaysia, UM, UKM, UPM, UTM, USM as research universities, will be acted as the pillars in endeavors to boost the position of local Public Higher Education Institutions at the international level. These universities have the following prominent key elements 1)

The field of study concentrating on research 2) The significance of competitive entry requirements 3) The importance of the lecturers' quality 4) Sustaining the ratio of 1:1 of postgraduates to undergraduates. In all research universities the objectives are as follows: 1) To increase research, development and commercialization activities 2) To boost the number of the postgraduates and post doctorate fellows 3) To raise the number of academic staff with PhD qualifications 4) To generate and enhance centres of excellence 5) To raise the number of foreign students and increase the international ranking of Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. The mission which is followed by research universities is to become the nation's growth engines, propose opportunities for students and academics who like to exchange ideas, and guide research in a supportive environment which will encourage exploration and creativity in the exploration of knowledge and producing of wealth, therefore enhancing the quality of life (Ujang, 2009, p.87).

The government of Malaysia is now stressing the development and research was done by the local universities especially research universities for the progression of the nation's economy. Therefore, research universities have to try harder towards improving its ranking among the prominent universities of the world as mentioned in the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES). Moreover, this is in line with the aim of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan which stated to have at least three Higher Education Institutions listed in the top 100 universities and one among the top 50 universities in the world by year 2020 (Ujang, 2009, p.87).

1.2.2 The concept of Learning Organization within Organizations and Universities in Malaysia

In line with the different developments which occurred after implementing Malaysia's ninth plan (2006-2010) such as sustaining economic progress, social justice, political stability and quality of life in Malaysia, and the great demand of the worldwide competition for instance emerging the new technologies, increasing in customers, and the expansion of information, the organizations' managers in Malaysia should be equipped with the skills to predict the future, where the

acceptance of the new opportunities and generating of the greater resilience is stressed. The Malaysian organizations should accomplish essential efforts to change themselves into organizations which are capable of adapting change in their organizations and surviving in the worldwide business environment. These abilities are relevant to the learning capability of organizations (Ahmad and Yunus, 2012).

The concept of learning organization in Malaysia is in its early stage. Only few studies have been done about learning organization in Malaysian organizations, indicating the lack of empirical research in this area. The research about INTAN (The National Institute of Public Administration) resulted in the transformation of INTAN into a learning organization (Malek Shah, 2005). Another research focused on three individual organizations in different fields, service oriented, economic development, and research and development fields to indicate how the Malaysian organizations understand the concept of learning organization. The study indicated that some evolving ideas on the learning organization concepts can be observed in all three organizations. The research found that understanding of learning organization was related to the organization's own identity, that what type of the organization is (Ahmad and Yunus, 2012).

The other study in the Malaysian public sector examined the individual perception of the innovation implementation and the learning culture concurrently in the context of an ongoing innovation implementation in the 11 Malaysian public sector organizations to find the influence of organizational context in the relationship between learning organization and the innovation implementation. The study found that although the learning culture of the organization has positive relation with the innovation implementation but the organizational context has an effect on this relationship (Sta. Maria, 2003).

The other research focused on two public sector organizations that tried to provide some practical applications and implications of organizational learning in the Malaysian public sector. The objective of the study was to implement the learning organization in Malaysian public sector (Sta. Maria, 2002). The paucity of learning organization study in Malaysia can be observed. One research investigated the

learning organization culture in Malaysian private higher learning institutions among the managers to explore relationships between learning organization dimensions and knowledge performance (Kumar and Idris, 2006). The other research investigated the perceptions of the academic librarians on the practices of team level learning in public and private university libraries in the Klang Valley of Malaysia. The study found that the academic librarians have positive perceptions on the practices of team level learning (Norliya and Azizah, 2007).

The investigation of the concept of learning organization in public research universities of Malaysia is new, so this research paved the way for researchers concerned with this matter. Nevertheless, some organizational theorists propose that universities are rigidly hierarchical, intensively maintain their status quo, structurally firm, and resistant to transformation (Lick and Kaufman, 2000, 2001). They manage bureaucratically which social learning is seemed as an ideal than practical theme. On the other hand, regarding to the objective of making Malaysia the centre of educational excellence in the region and in addition to assure that adequate knowledge workers are attainable for changing Malaysia into a knowledge-based economy and meeting the mounting demand for new skills and knowledge, it is important that Malaysia universities adapt to increasingly competitive environments, continuously nurture learning, and continuously develop their capacities (Kumar and Idris, 2003).

Regarding the importance of learning organization implementation in Malaysian organizations, it was essential for the current study to understand the perceptions of employees towards learning organization. The study about learning organization dimensions cannot be done in higher education institutions without knowing the employees' perceptions. As few studies have been done to determine the employees' perceptions of learning organization dimensions in higher education institutions, the researcher found this matter important to focus on (Norliya and Azizah, 2007; Ali, 2012).

Some studies have been carried out on the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimensions and

different non-financial performance indicators (Rose *et al.*2009; Tseng, 2010; Ialam*et al.* 2013; Islam*et al.* 2014; Islam *et al.,* 2015; Islam *et al.*, 2016; Trang *et al.*, 2013; Pak, 2007). The study by Rose *et al.* (2009) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization dimensions and work performance. The study by Tseng (2010) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization dimensions and organizational effectiveness. A study by Islam *et al.* (2015), showed the mediator role of affective commitment on the relationship between learning organization culture, perceived organizational support, and turnover intention. Another study by Islam *et al.* (2016) mentioned the mediating role of affective commitment on the relationship between learning organization culture and organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention. The study by Trang *et al*. (2013) confirmed the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization and employees' performance. Pak (2007) indicated the role of organizational commitment as a mediator on the relationship between learning organization and managers' work performance. The review of the previous studies indicated these studies focused on different organizational performance indicators, such as innovation, employees' performance, and turnover intention but the study of the relationship between learning organization dimension and organizational commitment as the mediator and knowledge performance improvement as an important organizational performance indicator has been neglected, so the current study was done to fill this gap.

1.3   Problem Statement, Research Gap and Research Opportunity

Since organizations confront unpredictable changes and fluctuating environment which have appeared due to information age, knowledge economy and technological progression, the best way for organizations to maintain competitive advantage is a readiness to adapt, change, and improve (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005; Joo, 2007). Organizations continuously search for new strategies to ensure about the organizational success or survival. The learning organization is the strategy for organizations to adapt to turbulent change (Pfeffer, 1994). The learning organization

has been mentioned as a strategy for developing organizational performance (Weldy, 2009). Regarding the significance of this matter for all organizations, public and private, many scholars tried to study the issue theoretically but few researchers have tried to investigate this subject empirically. Through reviewing the previous literatures, the most substantial issue which can be observed is the lack of practical studies in the field of learning organizations and particularly validating and investigating the applicability of the DLOQ (Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire) measurement for learning culture.

Since 1990, the implication of the learning organization phenomenon for organizational success has been extensively investigated and consequently there was tremendous growth in literature pertaining to the concept of the learning organization. However, most literatures are descriptive or perspective in nature and the efforts to quantify the notion have been rare (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Pedler *et al*, 1991; Campbell and Cains, 1994; Dibella, 1997; Ellinger *et al.,* 2002, 2003; Garvin, 1993, 2000; Griego *et al,* 2000; Johnson, 2002; Miolanen, 2001; Roth and Kleiner, 1995; Somerville and McConnell-Imbriotis, 2004; Thomsen and Hoest, 2001; Yang, 2003; Yang *et al.,* 2004).

The study about learning organization dimensions cannot be done in higher education institutions without knowing the employees' perceptions. As few studies have been done to determine the employees' perceptions of learning organization dimensions in higher education institutions, the researcher found this matter important to focus on (Norliya and Azizah, 2007; Ali, 2012). In the study of learning organization, it is important to concern on the influence of demographic characteristics of employees. Few studies have been carried out on the influence of demographic characteristics of employees on learning organizations dimensions (Lim, 2003; Wang *et al.,* 2007; Thakur and Chaudhuri, 2015).

There are few studies which have examined the differences in perceptions of learning organization dimensions based on non-academics' age levels (Wang *et al.,* 2007, Nazri and Pihie, 2012, Tseng, 2010). Wang *et al*., (2007) study investigated the differences in perceptions of learning organization culture based on different

levels of age. Nazri and Pihie (2012) studied the level of learning organization dimensions and differences based on demographics such as age and education level. Tseng (2010) carried out a survey to find out the effects of demographic characteristics of age and education on learning organization dimensions. There are few researches which have examined the differences in perceptions of learning organization dimensions based on non-academics' education levels (Nazri and Pihie, 2012; Tseng, 2010). There are few studies that have examined the differences in perceptions of learning organization dimensions among employees based on the different levels of working years in the current job (Lim, 2010; Thakur and Chaudhuri, 2015). The lack of study can be observed in examining the differences in perceptions of learning organization dimensions among employees based on the different hours devoted to learning new skills in the current job.

Many studies have been done by applying Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) in different cultural contexts of USA, Spain, China and Taiwan (Ellinger *et al.,* 2002; Hernandez, 2000; Lien *et al.*, 2006; Yang *et al.,* 2004; Zahang *et al.,* 2004). Since there are scarcity of studies in Asia Pacific region, especially in the country of Malaysia for obtaining the evaluation of DLOQ in terms of validity and applicability in the higher education context, therefore this issue must be stressed strongly.

A review of the literature reveals that learning organization is likely to lead to increase organizational performance. The empirical studies of Chaston *et al.* (1999); Ellinger *et al.* (2002, 2003); Hedges (1997); Jashapara (2003); Phillips (2003); Yeo (2002a, 2000b, 2003a, 2003b) have proved that learning organization has a positive relation with organizational performance. Learning organization comprises seven dimensions which are crucial to optimize organizational performance improvement (Simons *et al.,* 2003, Marsick and Watkins, 1999, Watkins and Marsick, 2003; Yang *et al.,* 2004; Yeo, 2002b).

There are empirical studies which assessed the relationship between learning organization and different performance indicators (Ellinger *et al.,* 2002; Watkins *et al.,* 1997; and Yang *et al.,* 2004; Song, 2008) and affirmed positive

relationship between learning organization and performance. Studies such as McHargue (1999); Ellinger *et al.* (2002); Davis and Daley (2008); Chajnacki (2007); and Demers (2009) focused on the relationship between learning organization dimensions and performance outcomes.

In certain literature, it is believed that perceived knowledge performance improvement is one of the organizational performance variables (Song *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Choi, 2003; Maeques and Simon, 2006; Visser and Stuter, 2007; Ho, 2008; Rhodes *et al.*, 2008; Wei, 2009; Liao *et al*, 2009; Kim and Gong, 2009; Pierre *et al*., 2009). The studies of Marsick and Watkins (2003); Davis and Daley (2008) proved that learning organization has positive relation with perceived knowledge performance improvement.

Kumar and Idris (2006) tested the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement among vice chancellors in 74 private colleges in Malaysia and confirmed the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement. The study of Kumar and Idris (2006) indicated the influence of learning organization dimensions in the relationship were positive significant.

The variable of organizational commitment was chosen since many studies have proposed that learning organization acts as an antecedent of organizational commitment and organizational performance outcomes, such as perceived knowledge performance (Ellinger *et al.,* 2002; Wang, 2005). In certain literature, learning organization is believed as an antecedent of organizational commitment (Najaf *et al.,* 2012).

Organizational commitment as an important variable is chosen for the conceptual model. Some studies (Johnson and Chang, 2008; Luthans *et el.,* 1985; Samad, 2005; Bartlet, 2001; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen; 1997; Usefi, 2013) presented the positive relationship between organizational commitment and performance in the organization. This research expands the literature on learning

organization notion by adding organizational commitment variable as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement.

The study by Kumar and Idris (2006) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement among vice chancellors in private collages in Malaysia and mentioned it is necessary that the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement be investigated in public and public research universities. Some studies have been carried out on the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimensions and different performance indicators (Rose *et al.* 2009; Tseng, 2010; Islam *et al.* 2013; Islam *et al.* 2014; Islam *et al.,* 2015; Islam *et al.*, 2016; Trang *et al.*, 2013; Pak, 2007). The study by Rose *et al.* (2009) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimensions and work performance. Tseng (2010) studied the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimensions and organizational effectiveness.

Islam *et al.*'s (2013) study confirmed that organizational commitment performed the role of mediator in the relationship between learning organization culture, leader member exchange, and turnover intention. In another study, Islam *et al.* (2014) indicated the mediating role of normative commitment in the relationship between learning organization culture and customer satisfaction. A study by Islam *et al.* (2015) showed the mediator role of affective commitment in the relationship between learning organization culture, perceived organizational support, and turnover intention. Another study by Islam *et al.* (2016) mentioned the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between learning organization culture and organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention.

The study by Trang *et al.* (2013) confirmed the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and

employees' performance. Pak (2007) indicated the role of organizational commitment as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization and managers' work performance.

Research Gap: After a detailed discussion on the problem statement, the current section explains the gap. The over-view of all the previous researches about the influence of organizational commitment as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization and non-financial organizational performance, it has been identified that the study of organizational commitment as a mediation in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement as an important non-financial organizational performance was neglected. Regarding the significance of this matter in organizational performance issue and insisting of other researchers such as Kumar and Idris (2006) for its essential consideration as an important study, the researcher found this matter important to be highlighted through the current study. This study concerns about perceived knowledge performance improvement as an important non-financial organizational performance indicators and the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement.

The variable of organizational commitment was chosen as a mediator as some studies proved the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimensions and different non-financial performance indicators (Rose *et al.*2009; Tseng, 2010; Ialam*et al.* 2013; Islam*et al.* 2014; Islam *et al.,* 2015; Islam *et al.*, 2016; Trang *et al.*, 2013; Pak, 2007). The study by Rose *et al.* (2009) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization dimensions and work performance. The study by Tseng (2010) indicated the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization dimensions and organizational effectiveness. A study by Islam *et al.* (2015), showed the mediation role of affective commitment on the relationship between learning organization culture, perceived organizational support, and turnover intention. Another study by Islam *et al.* (2016) mentioned the mediating role of affective commitment on the relationship between

learning organization culture and organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention. The study by Trang *et al*. (2013) confirmed the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between learning organization and employees' performance. Pak (2007) indicated the role of organizational commitment as a mediator on the relationship between learning organization and managers' work performance.

It is believed that perceived knowledge performance improvement is one of the organizational performance variables (Song *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Choi, 2003; Maeques and Simon, 2006; Visser and Stuter, 2007; Ho, 2008; Rhodes *et al*., 2008; Wei, 2009; Liao *et al*, 2009; Kim and Gong, 2009; Pierre *et al*., 2009). The studies of Marsick and Watkins (2003); Davis and Daley (2008) proved that learning organization has positive relation with perceived knowledge performance improvement. This study intends to fill the gap in the body of knowledge pertaining to learning organization, organizational commitment as a mediator with the specific focus on Watkins and Marsick's learning organization model in Malaysian public research universities. This study strengthens the positive relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment as proves the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement. This study expands the literature review by adding organizational commitment variable as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement and testing the mediator role of organizational commitment between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement in public research universities in Malaysia.

Research Opportunity: Based on the literature, it is essential to study the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement. In addition, the consideration of perceived knowledge performance improvement as an important organizational performance outcome has been supported by many researchers (Song *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Choi, 2003; Maeques and Simon, 2006; Visser and Stuter,

2007; Ho, 2008; Rhodes *et al*., 2008; Wei, 2009; Liao *et al*, 2009; Kim and Gong, 2009; Pierre *et al*., 2009).

Moreover, the consideration of organizational commitment as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization and organizational performance outcomes has been supported by the certain literatures (Jumar and Idris, 2006; Rose *et al.*2009; Tseng, 2010; Islam *et al.* 2013; Islam *et al.* 2014; Islam *et al.,* 2015; Islam *et al.*, 2016; Trang *et al*., 2013; Pak, 2007).

The results of the current study contribute to the literature on learning organization culture and perceived knowledge performance through expanding the model of learning organization in public research universities and testing the model. Since there is a few research previously which focused on the mediation role of the organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement among the administrative staff in public research universities in Malaysia, the current research that indicates the universities which practice learning organization strengthen the attachment of its administrative staff to the universities, which leads to higher perceptions towards knowledge performance improvement.

1.4   Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What is the perception of clerical staff towards learning organization practices in Malaysian top public research universities?
2. Which learning organization dimensions are considered prominent among clerical staff in Malaysian top public research universities?
3. Are there any differences among clerical staffs' perceptions towards learning organization dimensions based on the differences in age, the education level, the years of experience in the current type of job, and the individuals' hours devoted to learning new skills?

4. Is there a significant relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement?

5. Is there a significant relationship between learning organization dimension and organizational commitment?

6. Do affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment significantly mediate the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement?

1.5   Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationships between learning organization dimension, and organizational commitment as a mediator and perceived changes in knowledge performance improvement. Regarding with the purpose of this study the objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the perception towards learning organization dimensions among clerical staff in Malaysian top public research universities.

2. To find the prominent perceptions of learning dimensions among clerical staff in Malaysian top public research universities.

3. To examine whether there are significant differences among clerical staffs' perceptions towards learning organization dimensions based on differences in age, education level, years of experience in the current type of job, and the individuals' hours devoted to learning new skills.

4. To examine whether there is positive significant relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement.

5. To examine whether there is positive significant relationship between learning organization dimension and organizational commitment.

6. To examine the mediation role of affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment between learning

organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement.

1.6   Scope of the study

Some studies indicated that Dimensions of Learning Organization (DLOQ) was applied in different cultural contexts of USA, Spain, Korea, China and Taiwan (Ellinger *et al*., 2002; Hermandez, 2000; Lien *et al*., 2006; Yang *et al.,* 2004; Zahang *et al*, 2004). In Malaysia, few studies have applied DLOQ to examine its applicability with different subjects in the organizations and particularly in the higher education context (Sta. Maria, 2003; Kumar and Idris, 2006). The literature review determined no referred empirical study have examined organizational commitment as a mediator in the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement. Regarding this issue, the researcher focused on this matter.

The researcher, after reviewing the literature related to learning organization, chose Watkins and Marsick (1997) model for the conceptual model, and found this model as the best and the most complete model on learning organization concept. Ortenblad (2002) declared there are four perspectives for learning organization notion: the old organizational learning perspective, the learning at work perspective, the learning climate perspective, and the learning structure perspective. Watkins and Marsick's (1997) approach, offers an integrative and complete model for evaluating learning organization, which is the only theoretical framework that encompasses all four perspectives, that makes Marsick and Watkins model significant.

Organizational commitment and its three components, affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment as mediator were investigated in the relationship between learning organization dimension as an antecedent and perceived knowledge performance improvement as dependent. The perceptions of clerical staff towards learning organization dimensions were investigated also.

Non-academic staff particularly the clerical staff in five public research universities of Malaysia UTM, UPM, UM, UKM and USM were the main purposes of this research. This study was carried out in the faculties of five public research universities in Malaysia. The respondents were from 13 faculties in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in Johor Bahru, 12 faculties in University Malaya (UM) in Kuala Lumpur, 24 faculties in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang, 13 faculties in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in Selangor, and 16 faculties in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Selangor.

1.7   Contributions of the Study

This research has been done in the public research universities in Malaysia for the first time and the findings of the current research enhance the understanding of the mediator role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and the perceived knowledge performance improvement. The results of the current study contribute to the literature on learning organization and perceived knowledge performance improvement. Reviewing the literature indicated that the focus of previous studies were on the mediation role of organizational commitment with the other organizational performance indicators and the investigation of the mediation role of organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and the perceived knowledge performance improvement as an important organizational performance was neglected therefore the current research focused on the mediation role of the organizational commitment in the relationship between learning organization dimension and perceived knowledge performance improvement among the clerical staff in Malaysia. The research indicated that universities which practice learning culture strengthen the attachment of clerical staff to the universities, which leads to higher perceptions towards knowledge performance improvement. The current study adds to the literature by presenting empirical evidence for the relationship between learning organization dimension, organizational commitment as a mediator, and perceived knowledge performance improvement.

1.8   Definition of Terms

1.8.1   Knowledge Performance Improvement

Perceived knowledge performance improvement indicates to the respondents' perceptions of the current knowledge performance based on annual changes in information caused by new products or services. Knowledge performance is measured by the extent that knowledge capacity is increased or products and services is enhanced because of what has been learned (Davis and Daley, 2008).

1.8.2   Learning Organization

According to Watkins and Marsick (1993), the learning organization is defined as an organization that learns continuously and transforms itself. Learning is a continuous, strategically used process-integrated with and running parallel to work. Learning also enhances organizational capacity for innovation and growth. The learning organization has embedded systems to capture and share learning". Watkins and Marsick (1993) focused more on the system approach regarding the workplace applications and supportive environmental factors that promote persistent learning process.

1.8.3   Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as the strength of individuals identification with a particular organization. Several researchers have categorized the concept of organizational commitment into three major themes: affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

1.8.3.1   Affective Commitment

Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to the organization. Employees with strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

1.8.3.2   Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment refers to the extent to which the employee perceives that leaving the organization will be costly. Employees with strong countenance commitment remain because they have to do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

1.8.3.3   Normative Commitment

Normative commitment refers to the employee's feelings of obligation to the organization and the belief that staying is the right thing to do. Employees with strong normative commitment remain because they feel that they ought to do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

1.8.4   Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and also mentions the research problem and establishes the research objectives. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature and the relationship between the learning organization and organizational commitment. Chapter 3 contains an explanation of the research methodology. The methodology includes the research design and data collection procedure. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis which includes the descriptive statistics results and structural model. Finally, Chapter

5 summarizes the findings and discusses how these findings relate to the extant literature. It presents the conclusions of the research and also the recommendations for the future research.

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