Career advancement of academics in private higher education: A literature review

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Abstract
Purpose – This paper aims to explore the influence of individual and organizational variables on the career advancement of academics in Malaysian private universities.
Design/methodology/approach – The paper reviews the literatures on the factors that influence the academic's career advancement.
Findings - There is a considerable relationship between individual and organization factors and potential benefits of career advancement of academics. It can be serve as the basis for formulating hypotheses to be further investigation and discussion.
Practical Implications - This study contributes knowledge to career advancement among academics in private universities. These institutions are rapidly expanding in Malaysia to cater to the needs of achieving the entrance of 40 per cent of the population into tertiary education by the year 2020. At the tertiary education level, HRD is important specifically to create better awareness among academics about their career planning and aspirations, the role individual and organizational-related factors have in their careers and how they should respond to the services given by the institutions.
Originality – The paper reviews factors (individual and organizational factors) that are of concern to HRD managers in managing the career advancement of academics in rapidly developing private universities.

Keywords: Private Higher Education, Career Advancement, Academics

Research Type: Conceptual Paper

Introduction
For the last 20 years Malaysian has experienced a rapid process of transformation of Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs), which immensely increases the demand for tertiary education. The growth of the tertiary education in the country is seen as one of the important strategies towards achieving the status of a developed nation. This vision is enshrined in the New Economic Model (NEM) 2010 that aims to transform the Malaysia into a high income economy by the year 2020. The goal is to stimulate economic growth by improving workers' productivity across all sectors of society, in part through an improved system of affirmative action, sustainability and inclusiveness. A strategy to accomplish this goal is to empower the private sector including institutions of higher learning (IHLs).

Baruch (2004) has described the academic profession as the key profession of the twenty first century. The challenging roles of academics, in teaching, research and administration work are concerns that the academics need to take into serious consideration. The management in the IHLs is confronted with a variety of challenges (McLendon and Cronk, 1999). This is supported by Altbach (2005) who argues that academic challenges are very complex. The challenges include changes in the environment, manpower and expertise need, new policy development, technology creation, and research and development emphasis, establishment of new IHLs including the private ones. Therefore those changes and challenges have certainly impacted the academics' career advancement in the private IHLs.

Studies on career advancement of academics in Malaysian private IHLs is still in the embryonic stage compared to that in the public IHLs because the former is relatively newer in its establishment compared to the latter. Other differences include the public IHLs are fully funded and monitored by the government which is otherwise for the private IHLs. Therefore, the academics under public IHLs are more secured in terms of remunerations, promotion, and career advancement. However, the issue of promotion and other benefits in the private IHLs are controlled

and influenced by individuals or interest groups with certain variations among the universities. Hence, this has influenced the progress and development of the academic staff in the private IHLs.

There is still a knowledge gap in research on the academic' career advancement in Malaysia even though it has been well studied abroad but in a wider sector of employment. Past research had focused on the career advancement of managers, technicians, middle management and supervisory levels, and professionals. Wood's (2006) study was on middle managers' career advancement in Australia. Subsequent studies include perception on the teaching profession by Leatherman (2000), academic women's career advancement (Bain and Cummings 2000), academic freedom (Altbach, 2001), strategic career development for R & D staffs (Petroni, 2000), personal, role and organizational variables and promotion to managerial positions in the Israeli education system (Cohen, Granot-Shilovsky, and Yishai, 2007), intention to leave the profession as academic (Huisman, DeWeert, and Bartelse, 2002), career aspiration of R&D professionals in Malaysia (Ismail and Sofiah, 2011), and faculty career strategies preferred by university administrators and faculty (Bierly and Lewis, 1989). Despite the vastly available literature on academics, there is precious little explanation on factors influencing the career advancement of academics, especially those in private IHLs.

In addition, there are also studies conducted on higher education such as research and training (Altbach, 2002); the future of higher education in China and India (Altbach, 2009); internationalization of higher education (Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari, 2009); internationalizing higher education that compares the challenges of different higher education institutions in Malaysia (Tham and Kam, 2008); students' satisfaction levels in private higher education in Malaysia (Sohail and Saeed, 2003); expansion of private higher education in Korea (Chae and Hong, 2009) and higher education challenges to academe in a time of globalization (Verri, 2003). The above studies however, were not on the determinants of individual and organizational factors to the career advancement of academics particularly at private IHLs.

This study is therefore intended to explore gaps in the study of higher education which specifically focuses on the career advancement of academics. This study is also conducted at the right time because the private IHLs have gained prominence due to liberalization of higher education in Malaysia. The Malaysian private IHLs offer high growth prospect because with its population of 9395 academic staff (MoHE, 2001), Malaysia qualifies as an attractive educational hub in the region. The fact that the role of the private sector will be intensified in the national development as indicated in the New Economic Model shows that the private IHLs complement the public IHLs in developing a high-income economy nation by 2020 (NEM, 2010). This paper is organized as follows: research problem, purpose of research, literature review, and conclusion on HRD.

Problem statement and purpose of research

In recent years, career research has focused on the career advancement of academics whether in public or private universities. The increasing number of academics, especially in Malaysia as a result of the serious efforts undertaken to make the country an educational hub in Southeast Asia, has fuelled such interest. However, academics particularly from private universities face uncertain career advancement. A study by Huisman and Currie (2004) in Europe, for instance, argues that intention to leave the academic profession is high in higher institutions of learning. Huisman and Currie (2004) found that 42 per cent academics plan to end their career as academics to join other professions; 15 per cent academics plan to leave the profession once they reached retirement age and they are not keen to pursue a similar line of work; 12 per cent academics plan to find other sources of income, for example, to operate businesses related to the education field and 10 per cent academics plan to continue working until they secure a good job and better opportunities. The scenario in Malaysia is no different. Amin (2002) found that there were complaints among academics in private institutions of higher education in Malaysia. For example, high turnover rates were recorded over a three-year period (14 per cent in 1997, 29 per cent in 1998 and 37 per cent in 1999) in one of the private universities in Kuala Lumpur. Researchers such as Siron (2005) and Morris, Arzmi, and Wood (2004) further mentioned that the Malaysian government has often expressed its concern about the high turnover of academics in higher education institutions in Malaysia, primarily from private universities. This raises questions about the status of work of the academics at the universities of which one is in relation to their career advancement.

Career advancement is believed to be one of the dominant factors for the growth of the academic profession and universities (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Altbach, 2004). The fastest-growing sector of higher education worldwide as well as in Malaysia is the private sector. The rapid expansion of the private sector of higher education will have an impact on public universities in terms of the careers of the academics because of competitiveness within the profession in both types of universities in various ways (Altbach, 2009), for example the setting up of research public universities. However, little is known about the influence of personal and organizational factors on the career advancement of academics in private universities because the available local research does not focus specifically on the influence of individual and organizational variables on career advancement. Hence, the research question of this article is "How do individual and organizational factors

contribute to the career advancement of academics?" Studying the influence of individual and organizational factors on career advancement is important in strengthening the complex interdependency of the factors in the HRD system particularly in academia because HRD consists of elements of career development, and individual and organizational performance.

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of individual- and organizational- related variables on the career advancement of academics in private universities. The significance of the study is to add value to the body of knowledge on career advancement and its determinants that will be used for the strategic planning of career advancement for academics. Specifically, the literature of this study would clarify the significance of individual and organizational factors in determining academics' career advancement; the country's tremendous progress in its economy has made the nation highly dependent on the development of education particularly in the private sector.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent. Brown, and Hackett, 1994) is derived from Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory to further understand individuals' career interest, goals and performance. This theory features individual factors (e.g. family, personal characteristics, interests, self-efficacy and goals) together with the environment (e.g. organizational factors) and its influence on outcome expectation and hence the process of career development.

Lent et al. (1994) had organized SCCT into two components. The first component is about learning experiences that will shape self-efficacy and outcome expectations. This component describes how a person's physical background interacts with the background contextual environment to form a variety of learning experiences. The second component is about external factors to the person, which is called environmental support, and environmental influences such as social and organizational factors that can provide positive support or negative barriers (Flores and O'Brien, 2002). Later, Lent et al. (2000) divided environment variables into proximal and distal influences. They defined proximal influences as external barriers to career goals that occur instantly, whereas distal influences need time to occur (e.g. opportunity for skill development that helps to shape interests and self-cognition). These important environmental variables are assumed to influence cognitive-person variables and other aspects of career behavior.

From the theoretical perspective, this study aims to extend the existing knowledge of career advancement with specific reference to the SCCT (Lent et al., 2000) that was used as the underlying theory for this research. The theory basically consists of person inputs, contextual influences, outcome expectation or performance. In this study, person inputs are represented by individual variables; contextual influences are represented by organizational factors and outcome expectation by career advancement.

Career advancement is conceptualized to include an objective and more comprehensive measure of subjective career advancement as suggested by Heslin (2003). Subjective career advancement measures both the organizational perspectives and non-organizational or individual perspectives. In addition, most career studies using SCCT involved adolescents or students as the study subjects and were largely done in a Western context (Constantine et al., 2006; Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, and Scanlan, 2006). A career study conducted in Malaysia (Mohd Rasdi, Ismail, Uli, and Noah, 2009) involved managers in the public sector.

Therefore, the present study addresses the previous argument in an effort to increase our understanding of academics' career advancement in private universities in an Asian country. It further extends research on SCCT; however, it is limited only to individual and organizational variables that influence the career advancement of academics.

Literature review

The literature highlights an aspect of career advancement of academics from private IHLs. Individual factors literature clearly show that personality (conscientiousness, neuroticism, and extraversion) plays an important role in developing career advancement. The first trait is conscientiousness which describes the extent to which individuals are hardworking, organized, dependable and persistent (Mayrhofer, Steyrer, Meyer, Strunk, Schiffinger, Lellatchitch, 2005). Thus, conscientiousness is much related to an individual's degree of self-control, need for achievement, order and persistence. The hallmarks of conscientiousness, it is not surprising that the construct is a valid predictor of career advancement. Literature evidence supports the importance of conscientiousness at work, likely linking the retention, higher attendance, career success and better work behavior (Judge. Higgins, Thoreson, Barrick, 1999) and all these related to job performance. This indicates that conscientiousness links positively to careers of academics and it is important for progress to a higher level.

McCrae and Costa (2006) note that neuroticism is the most pervasive trait across personality measures; it is prominent in nearly every measure of personality. Neuroticism leads to at least two related tendencies; one dealing with anxiety such as instability and stress proneness, and the other addressing one's wellbeing such as personality insecurity and depression. In private IHLs anxieties such as instability, insecurity and depression are always a major problem. Private IHLs always espoused with stringent policies, highly regulated, lack of funds, competitive

environment and lack of motivation and over loaded with work. Therefore, in designing career advancement, neuroticism has always been a trait and a very important one too for private IHLs administrators. Similar past studies such as that by Suls, Green, and Hills (1998) and Barrick, Mount, and Judge, (2001) support the argument that neurotic individuals are likely to be affected by negative life events, and to have bad moods. This emotional stability is a good predictor for job performance. It is indicative that higher emotional stability tends to lead to better career advancement (Mayrhofer et al., 2005).

The extraversion is another important factor in personality. It refers to the degree of an individual as gregarious, assertive and social able as opposed to reserved, timid and passive. Past studies show extraversion has positive effects on careers (Mayrhofer et al., 2005). The positive effect such as promotion, hierarchical progression, and salary are the indicators for career advancement (Burt, 1997). Extraversion is related to the experience of positive emotions, and extraverts are more likely to take on leadership roles and to have a greater number of close friends (Watson and Clark, 1997).

The other variables such as family and work-life balance are significant because private IHLs are newly established. Since IHLs are newly established the recruitment policies are very tolerant and thus young graduates with less experience are recruited as a measure to save cost, inherently creating job opportunities for the younger generation. Thus the majority of academic staff in private IHLs are very young and are still in their early 30s with young children or still single. Therefore family support and work-life balance variables are very important for these career beginners (Roper, Cunningham and James, 2003). It is evident that the working experience factor is significant to the academics' career advancement. This result is supported by Cooper (2000) and Bimrose (2001) who argue that the career progress is highly dependent on family support including spousal support.

Literature clearly show that organizational support plays important roles in sustaining and shaping academics' career. Baruch and Hall (2004) noted that academic career has unique features and its plays a vital role in determining career advancement among academics in university. In addition, Appelbaum, (2002) advocated that the organizational factor is important for career planning. These have been reflected in the literature and empirical findings show identical results. The private IHLs are very supportive in terms of encouraging staff to work from home (tele-working), with information technology advancement and more flexible work; work from home is arranged for their classes and work closer with academic staff.

The influence of social networks to the academic career advancement are important especially in understanding their multiple roles in dealing with external parties such as external examiners, researchers, ministry, and academics from other universities, practitioners, students and community. The finding shows that the social networks are not significant. This is because the private IHLs do not really encourage the academics to participate in conferences, collaborative work, seminar, workshops, or any other form of networks. This is due to the lack of financial support for academics to get involved in conferences and such; instead they only focus on teaching. In private IHLs, the semester is ongoing process and with an emphasis on teaching and service student for profit orientation. This indicates that social networks are not really given priorities by private IHLs. However, Higgins (2001) argued that social networks directly shape career by regulating access of jobs, providing mentoring and sponsorship, channelling the flow of information and referrals and increasing the likelihood and speed of promotion. The other variable which is mentoring was insignificant because private IHLs a newly established. Since it is newly established the experience or senior position staff are very few or non-existent. This has affected the mentoring practice in private IHLs. In private IHLs we can argue that the management will never encourage mentoring program or mentoring is still not in their management culture in developing the staff.

The private IHLs should have a lot more to offer to the academics to leverage their academics in their career development. More organizational provisions should be made available to the academics such as, financial supports for conferences, research leave, sabbatical leave, and rewards for publication, flexi work arrangement and some other related rewards for motivation. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) argued that organizational support is very important for individual's career advancement. This is vital because private IHLs should be equally moving forward with the vibrant public sector in achieving the goals of Malaysia's NEM that should be materialized by 2020.

Conclusions on HRD

Study concludes that individual and organizational factors play an important role in career advancement among academics. These predictors are family support, extraversion, neuroticism, organizational support, conscientiousness, work-life balance, work experience, social network, flexi work and mentoring. Hence, it can be said that these factors significantly contributing to career advancement of academics.

The conclusion of the study are consistent with the existing theories, the major theoretical implication was that the underlying theories of the study were found to be relatively comprehensive in explaining the career advancement among academics' in private IHLs. Consequently, these theories for example Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994), Person- Environment-Fit Model (1997) and Human Capital Theory (1993), therefore,

suggest that the career advancement is determined by two major factors; individual factors and organizational factors, and could be constructed as having a degree of stability, particularly based on the contexts of the study. Career is being viewed as a key strategic tool in the attraction and retention of academics, social network, and organizational support. In doing that, HRD functions need to take a fresh start at the role of sustainable career advancement, mentoring, social network, family support and organizational support of achieving career advancement. The findings of this research suggest several implications to the HRD which are discussed below. Career-focused skills training, such as providing training in socialization skills to allow academics to build networks.

Linking career advancement to human resource development and performance management. This research used SCCT theory to examine academics' career advancement. That is a major implication on HRD which this theory need to be tested in the academic field.

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