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Academics' Career Success at Malaysian Research Universities: A Literature Review

¹Al-Mansor Abu Said, ²Tengku Shahrniza Tengku Abdul Jalal, ³Roziyah Mohd Rasdi, ⁴Mazni Alias, ⁵Suzaimah Sulaiman

¹Faculty of Business, Multimedia University, Jalan Ayer Keroh Lama, 75450 Melaka Malaysia

²Learning Institute for Empowerment, Multimedia University, Jalan Ayer Keroh Lama, 75450 Melaka Malaysia

³Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43300 Serdang, Malaysia.

⁴Institute of Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43300 Serdang, Malaysia.

⁵Faculty of Business Administration, Open University Malaysia, 43300 Serdang, Malaysia.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The theories underpinning this study are based on three models: The Advanced Model of SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2006), Proactive Behaviour Model (Crant, 2000), and Integrated Models of Career Success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007). **Objective:** The purpose of this article is to develop a conceptual framework to measure academics' career success at Research Universities. **Results:** Five factors are found to have potential influences on academics' career success. The factors comprise of human capital factors, personality factors, person job-fit, personal and professional networking, and proactive behaviour. Additionally, this study projected that proactive behaviour mediates the relationship between personality and academics' career success. **Conclusion:** The practical implications here are in terms of strengthening the HRD framework through organizational development, training and career development that can promote positive career outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

Achieving career success has been emphasized in the policy development in many countries due to its potential in developing human resources and organizational performance (Richard, 2005). However, only few studies have been found to have explored into the career success of academics especially those at the Research Universities. Past researches remained focused mostly on other types of employees such as public sector managers (Roziyah, Garavan, Maimunah, Mohd Rasdi, & Ismail, 2012), accountant (Kirchmeyer, Reinstein, & Hasselback, 2000), engineers (Heredia, 2008), entrepreneurs (Ishfad *et al.*, 2010) and military officers (Rodriguez, 2009).

Career success has become more protean where the responsibilities of one's career have shifted from organizational to individual, and it is not culturally neutral. Although career is said to be influenced by culture (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godschalk, 2000; Kats, Emmerik, Blenkinsopp, & Khapova, 2010; Meyer, Hecht, Gill, & Toplonysky, 2010) career literature has not fully explained this dynamism (Thomas, 2004). Very few have explored what career means at the international perspective (e.g., Doherty,

Dickmann, & Mills, 2010; Nazar & Heijden, 2012), and researches on career related perceptions are scarce especially in the third world countries (Counsell & Popova, 2000). This is also true in the context of Malaysia.

This study has a unique milieu involving academics at Malaysian Research Universities. The research universities are differentiated from their non-research counterparts in terms of their focus on research and commercialization activities apart from the conventional teaching and learning activities. Commencing in 2006, a total of four universities, namely Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) have been granted the Research Universities status, and in 2010, another university that is Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) was awarded with the same status. The growth of Research Universities in Malaysia is in line with the nation's aspirations to be an educational hub in the near future. The primary concerns of Malaysian Research Universities are (i) the quantity and quality of researcher, (ii) the quantity and quality of research, (iii) the number of postgraduate enrolment (iv) the quality of postgraduate programmes (v) innovation, (vi)

Corresponding Author: Tengku Shahrniza Tengku Abdul Jalal, Learning Institute for Empowerment (LiFE), Multimedia University, Jalan Ayer Keroh Lama, 75450 Melaka, Malaysia.
Tel: 0060136133771, E-mail: shahrniza.jalal@mmu.edu.my

professional services, and (vii) networks and links. Research Universities is given the priority in terms of allocation of grants for research from the government which can be extended to postgraduate students in the forms of scholarships, equipment and research activities financing. Such devotion to research and commercialization that ensued is hoped to bring in more funds to these universities. Not only that, the Research Universities must generate 30 percent of its own financial resources (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2011).

Given the lack of empirical studies on career success based on academic context and centred on Research Universities specifically, this paper aims to develop a conceptual framework to determine career success of academics in the Malaysian Research Universities.

Definition of academics' career success:

The definitions of career success have evolved from the traditional definitions, which are based on individual hierarchical development to contemporary definitions which incorporate the psychological elements (Baruch, 2004; Sullivan, Baruch, & Schepmyer, 2009). According to Judge, Kammeyer-Mueller and Bretz (2004), Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001), Heslin, (2003), Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman (2005) and Breland, Treadway, Duke and Adams (2007) career success is described as the result of psychological or work related and positive outcomes or personal and professional achievements in the individual career life. Career success is further explained by involving both dimensions of objective and subjective success (Baruch, 2004; Breland *et al.*, 2007; Nabi, 2001). These dimensions are also referred to as extrinsic and intrinsic success. In addition, Nabi (2003) has emphasized the importance of subjective career success because of its implications for psychological well-being and quality of work life.

Based on our reviews, most researchers have used conventional measurements in the study of academics' career success. We noted that most researchers in the early 80s have used salary, promotion, recognition and job security as indicators of extrinsic career success of academics in higher learning institutions. In addition, career satisfaction has been used as a measure of intrinsic career success. For instance, Finkestein's (1984) measures of academics' career success include three hierarchically ordered indicators such as (i) having a secured job in a good institution; (ii) moving up the organizational ladder in terms of rank and salary; and (iii) achieving recognition from one's disciplinary colleagues for contributions in the field of study. Markus (1987) in his study includes vicarious achievements (e.g., seeing students succeed), enjoying work, serving others, balancing family and professional lives, and maintaining personal values as indicators. In agreement with the traditional

definitions, Youn (1988) suggested that academic career success is contingent upon attainment of one's share of the distribution of opportunities and rewards. He argued that structures for these rewards and opportunities vary mostly as a result of American colleges and universities differentiating themselves on the basis of two major tasks: educating students and advancing knowledge through research. This is in line with Amey (1993) who argued that promotion is a form of recognition and the backbone of the traditional academic reward system.

In the mid-90s, researchers began to include research productivity as extrinsic career success indicator besides obtaining financial reward. Some researchers believe that financial reward is not the mere factor that can motivate academics to enter and remain in academia. Wenzel (1996) viewed academics' career success dichotomously, i.e. (i) achieving success in terms of getting promoted, tenured and published, and (ii) attaining career satisfaction from these types of achievements valued by the university. During this period also, reputation, recognition, promotion and research productivity have been used to determine career success of academics. Nevertheless, some researchers believe that research publication is the most important criteria to measure career success of academic at higher learning institutions (e.g., Blackburn, & Lawrence, 1995; Buddeberg-Fischer, Stamm, Buddeberg, & Klaghofer, 2008; Dowd & Kaplan, 2005; Pezzoni, Sterzi, & Lissoni, 2012; Thomas, 2004).

Beginning of the year 2000, the success in producing quality researches has begun to be an indicator of academic career success. Kaderli, Muff, Stefenelli and Businger (2011) also argued that career success should be measured with the quality of academic research. Riordan's and Louw-Potgieter's (2011) study of women academics' career success has incorporated various measures such as career satisfaction, research publications in indexed journals, research grants obtained, the number of papers presented at international seminars, participation in faculty administration and professional contributions to the community. Looking at the changes depicted from one research to the other, it can be concluded that the definition of academic career success has evolved from the elements of financial rewards and promotion to production quality of research.

In Malaysian context, academics' performances are based on their accomplishment of certain criteria established by the Ministry of Higher Education. The criteria include: (i) instructional and learning scores, (ii) administration scores (iii) scores of research grants, (iv) scores of research publications; (v) supervision scores and (vi) professionals service scores (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005). With regards to the Research Universities, we suggest that

these institutions follow Riordan's measures of career success, for it takes into consideration both types of success. Based on the above discussion, it is concluded that the definition of career success in the

academia is unique and different from other sectors, particularly in research and publication achievements. The evolution of the above definitions of career success is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of Academics' Career Success

Source	Indicators of academic career success
Finkestein (1984)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job security in the tertiary educational institution • promotion and salary • recognition
Markus (1987)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic success of students • career satisfaction • contribution to the community • balance between work and family life and profession and have noble personal values
Amey (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion
Blackburn & Lawrence (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research publications
Wenzel (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion • research publications • career satisfaction
Sargent & Waters (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognition of personal achievement
Thomas (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research publications
Dowd & Kaplan (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research publications
Buddeberg-Fischer <i>et al.</i> (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research publications • research grants • present papers at seminar • recognition
Kaderli <i>et al.</i> (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of research
Riordan & Louw-Potgieter (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extrinsic career success (publications, academic qualifications, teaching evaluation and professional services) • intrinsic career success (career satisfaction)
Pezzoni <i>et al.</i> (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion • research publications • recognition
Ministry of Higher Education (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching and learning • contribution to the administration • research grants • research publications • thesis/post graduate supervision • professional services

Academics' career in the Malaysian research universities:

As of 2010 statistics, there are 36 universities in Malaysia. Out of this total, 20 are public universities and 16 are privately owned universities. Additionally, there are approximately 690 private colleges offering programmes at diploma and certificate levels (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2011). The public universities are essentially nonprofit organizations receiving funding from the government. Out of 20 public universities in Malaysia, only five universities are designated as Research Universities. These universities are Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). One of the advantages of such designation is the ability to obtain additional grants and financial assistance from the government for research, development and commercialisation activities. These five Research Universities have been established for more than thirty years while others are relatively new (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005).

According to the Index of Service Scheme for the New Remuneration System and Malaysian Remuneration System issued by the Public Service Department in 2002 (Siddiquee, 2006), academics' salary scheme at public universities came under the jurisdiction of the Special Cabinet Committee on Public Sector Employment and Wages. One of the advantages of academic career in public universities, especially at Research Universities is in term of promotion, whereby academics can be promoted regardless of vacancies of the higher level positions (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). This indicates that individuals' opportunity to achieve objective career success in Research Universities is relatively unlimited thus their career success is highly dependent on individual factors. The academic career ladder in Research Universities begins with tutor, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor. Ling & Said (2008) added that academic staffs in research universities could easily obtain promotion in other public universities based on their involvement on research and publication activities. In Research Universities, attaining PhD degree is a requirement for academics' career advancement. This is also in line with government efforts to

strengthen the reputation and capacity of Malaysian Research Universities.

The five research universities in Malaysia have a total of 9943 academics (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010) with only 49.1% (4882) of those with PhD qualification. Of those with PhD qualifications, 60.4% (2949) are male with female making up the rest. The total number of professors is 1145 representing 11.5% of the total academics with male and female representing 74% (843) and 26.4% (302), respectively. The breakdown according to

each university is illustrated in Table 2. In line with the objective to further improve the quality of lecturers, the government has set a target of 60 percent of academic staff with PhD degree in these Research Universities. In the year 2006, the government has allocated a total of RM1.2 billion under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to train a total of 6,300 people, including academic staffs in Research Universities to pursue their PhD (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

Table 2: Statistics of academics according to number of PhD holders and professors at Malaysian Research Universities as at 2010

Uni	No of PhD holders		No of Profs		% of PhD Holder	Total of Profs
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
UM	649 (59%)	455 (41%)	233 (67%)	116 (33%)	49.4	349 (3.5%)
USM	629 (61%)	397 (39%)	156 (85%)	27 (15%)	55.4	183 (1.8%)
UKM	502 (55%)	415 (45%)	190 (69%)	84 (31%)	40.5	274 (2.8%)
UPM	562 (57%)	429 (43%)	127 (73%)	46 (27%)	63.9	173 (1.7%)
UTM	607 (72%)	241 (28%)	137 (83%)	29 (17%)	41.8	166 (1.7%)
Total	2949 (60%)	1937 (40%)	843 (74%)	302 (26%)	49.1	1145 (11.5%)

Source: (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p.62)

Theorizing academics' career success:

This study takes into account factors of career success from three original theories and models namely the Advanced Model of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent & Brown, 2006), Integrated Model of Career Success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007) and Model of Proactive Behaviour (Crant, 2000). The Advanced Model of SCCT explains the influence of contextual factors (organizational support), individual factors (human capital, personaliti and social capital) and person environment fit on intrinsic career success. The Model of Proactive Behaviour (Crant, 2000) explains indirect relationship between individual and organisational factor on career success, while the Integrated Model of Career Success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007) explains the direct and indirect impact of personality and organisational factor on career success.

The first model is the Advanced Model of SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2006) which is an extension of the SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) that explains the influence of contextual factors (e.g., organizational support) and individual factors (e.g predisposition, gender, race, health and status) on career performance. It was also designed to explain the complex interrelationships among career interest, career choice and performance. Lent & Brown (2006) developed the advanced model to parsimoniously explain career success. The advanced model describes the cognitive function of social

variables (self-efficacy), personality characteristics (extraversion and conscientiousness) and contextual variable (organisational support) in explaining career satisfaction (intrinsic career success). This advanced model is important to link the contextual factors, personality factors, cognitive variables (self-efficacy) and behaviour (proactive behaviour) on career success.

SCCT is originally derived primarily from the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) which aims to explain how an individual: (i) develops vocational interests, (ii) makes career choice, and (iii) achieves career satisfaction and success (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996; Lent & Brown, 2006; Lent, Taveira, & Lobo, 2012). In SCCT, individual's career-related behaviours (such as engaging in a particular career strategies, intentions to leave, performance and job satisfaction) are influenced by several aspects such as individual characteristics, personal factors (goal setting, self-efficacy and outcome expectations), and individual's exposure to learning (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Brown, 2003; Brown, Lent, Telander & Tramayne, 2011; Lent & Brown, 2008; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Sheu *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, personal goals serve as motivational drive that engages individuals towards proactive action which in turn benefits their career advancement. Meanwhile, organizational support such as providing training activities will facilitate individuals in acquiring skills and knowledge which result in rapid promotion and salary increments (Guthrie, Coate, &

Schwoerer, 1998). In short, the Advanced Model of SCCT explains how individual perception, personality and behavioural variables predict one's career-related choice.

The second model is the Integrated Model of Career Success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007) that essentially integrated the organizational, individual and behaviour factors from SCCT (Lent and Brown, 1994). The main factors in this model are individual factors, contextual factors and proactive behaviour. Barnett and Bradley (2007) identified the role of proactive behaviour as mediating variable on the relationship between independent variables and career success besides their direct effects.

The third model is the Proactive Behaviour Model (Crant, 2000). This model was originally a model that explains the determinants of proactive behaviour in management. Proactive Behaviour Model suggests that the individual and contextual factors have influence on proactive behaviour which in turn drives career success. Crant (2000) argued that proactive behaviour is a must for employees to achieve career success. This proactive behaviour implies the importance of amongst other things, planning, action and performing self-initiated work towards achieving career success (Crant, 2000).

After synthesizing the factors from the relevant models and theories above, the framework of this study is produced. It is made up of personality (extraversion and conscientiousness), person-environment fit, human capital and social capital from the Advanced Model of SCCT, while organisational support and proactive factors variables are adapted from the Integrated Model of Career Success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007) and the Model of Proactive Behaviour (Crant, 2000). However, three factors are common to all the three underlying models, which are individual, organisational and behavioural factors.

Based on the thorough investigation made, this study proposed that the key factors that are capable of explaining career success among academics in Malaysian Research Universities are: (i) human capital factors, (ii) personality factors, (iii) person-environment fit, (iv) organizational support, (v) social capital, and (vi) behavioural factor (proactive behaviour). The following section describes the effects of these factors on academics' career success.

Conclusions and implication for hrd theory and practice:

This paper intends to develop a conceptual framework to determine academics' career success at the Malaysian Research Universities. The framework is supported by the Advanced Model of SCCT Barnett & Bradley (2007), Crant, (2000), Lent & Brown (2006) and Riordan & Louw-Potgieter (2011) as well as other related empirical evidences. Though the majority of previous studies reviewed utilised non-academic samples such as managers, doctors,

MBA students and entrepreneurs, it is postulated that academics' career success is also predicted by the same variables. While the context of academics career is different from others, this different context itself warrants a systematic investigation to validate the framework. Hence, this study deduces six main factors which are found to be highly correlated with academics' career success (i.e., human capital factors, personality factors, organizational support, person-environment fit, social capital and proactive behaviour) (see Figure 1).

Specifically, the independent variables proposed in this study are: human capital factors (education level, religiosity, and work experience), personality factors (extraversion, conscientiousness), organizational support, person-environment fit and social capital. This study also posits proactive behaviour as mediating variable. The two dimensional dependent variables are objective and subjective career success. Due to the different nature of performance appraisal system in the academic context, unique and context specific measures of objective career success were suggested. These objective measures include salary, number of promotion, number of publications, teaching evaluation and community service. For the subjective career success, the established Likert-like instrument which has been adopted and adapted in previous career success studies shall be utilized. In addition, proactive behaviour was hypothesized as the mediating variable. As a mediator variable, proactive behaviour not only influences objective and subjective career success but also is affected by organisational support. Figure 1 illustrates the direct and indirect relationships between organisational support and career success while the proactive behaviour acts as a mediator variable.

This study is expected to add values in terms of conceptual perspectives, human resources practices and policy development. This study proposes a conceptual model of individual career success within the context of academia. Having unique career features and performance appraisal system made the academic career model unlike any other traditional career model which was solely based on hierarchical considerations. With the changing nature of careers, and the shift of career management from organization to individual responsibility, it is believed that the academic career model can be an alternative career success model to be further explored in different job sectors. The proposed academic career success model can also serve as a prototype for the contemporary new career model (Hall, 2002), boundary less career (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), intelligent career (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995) and resilient career (Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994).

In practice, this study seeks to understand and determine the strategies and initiatives that should be administered by the Research Universities in order to

improve and enhance academics' career success. Though academics careers are characterized as the protean career or self-managed career, universities should also take certain efforts to strengthen and support the development of the proposed factors through training and educational programmes. Furthermore, the universities could also enhance or introduce the implementation of the mentor-protégé programme to provide role models to academics especially among the junior staffs.

For policy development, the findings of the study would emphasize the importance of human capital and personality factors, the reciprocal

relationships between person-environment fit, organisational support, social capital and proactive behaviours of academics in achieving their career success. Since the objective measures of academics' career success represent the performance indicators of Research Universities, academics achievement and performance in their career would also contribute towards the advancement of the university. Along these lines, academics' performance and universities' reputation are vital in order to move Malaysia towards a knowledge-based society and high income economy. These are also the highlights of the Tenth Malaysia Plan (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

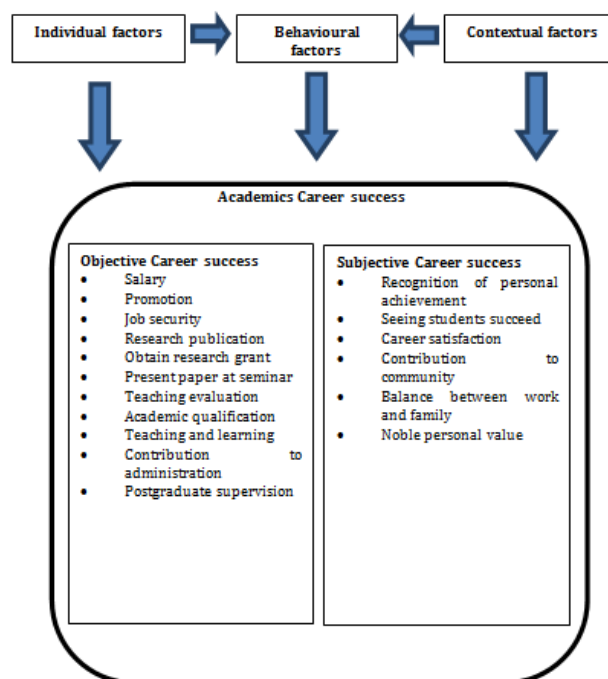


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework for academics' career success.

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