

# Innovative Work Behaviour in Higher Education Institutions: The Role of Learning at the Individual Level

Nur Hazelen Mat Rusok<sup>1</sup>, Naresh Kumar Samy<sup>2\*</sup>, Amiya Bhaumik<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Malaysian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

<sup>3</sup>Lincoln University College, Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

Educational institutions can sustain academic offerings with profound quality standards by implementing reform policies and activities involving continuous learning and progressive inquiry and dialogue. In addition, higher education institutions have to strongly emphasize reaffirming the foundations of an atmosphere that is learner-oriented, pleasant, and instructional. Because of the commitment to quality assurance, it has become possible to identify strengths and potential while simultaneously monitoring areas of weakness. A significant increase in the innovative work behaviour of higher education institutions has the potential to considerably benefit in eliminating the socio-economic disparities that exist in the present, particularly in the established country. Even though it is steadily getting attention in the context of higher education institutions, the learning organization aspects can increase inventive capacity. This is commonly viewed as essential and looked forward in commercial organizations. This study report aims to improve the position of higher education institutions as learning organizations that contribute to the closing of knowledge gaps worldwide and strengthen the global economy's revolutionary demands. The data for this empirical work came from an online survey conducted with academics ranked by professors from public higher education institutions in Malaysia. The SmartPLS allows for generating a structural model that draws inferences on the bonding between learning organization aspects and innovative work behaviour. Additionally, the model provides implications for research and practice in the academic discipline.

**Keywords:** Continuous learning, inquiry and dialogue, higher education institutions, innovation, innovative work behaviour, learning organization, Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

Advancement and the capacity for individual innovation, which is required to develop innovative work behaviour, are among the primary factors determining the extent to which educational services at higher education institutions can improve. The endurance of an organization, whether it be a large corporation, a for-profit or non-profit organization, agencies under the government, educational institutions, a public institution, a private institution, or any number of other types of organizations, necessitates a multifold revolution in the manner in which work is conducted while sustaining standards. In the event that this issue is not addressed, the organizations will be forced into a problematic situation, which may be temporary or permanent (Choi, Chung & Choi, 2019; Javed et al., 2019; Voolaid & Ehrlich, 2017). To stay up with the

ever-changing competitive living landscape, every educational institution must persistently modify, adapt, unlearn, and relearn to remain competitive. Engaging in a process of change and renewal is essential to preserve advantage. The learning organization elements, namely continuous learning and inquiry and dialogue that take place within higher education institutions, are the mechanism that makes this possible. The emergent structure of a culture that had grown with conscious and subconscious learning was named “learning organization” by a professor from MIT, Senge, in 1990 and has received attention worldwide ever since.

Through continually adjusting to changing conditions, such as industrial revolutions, a learning organization can construct the structure and resilience essential for its success. According to Dedahanov et al. (2017), higher education institutions must consider establishing creative structures comparable to those of other companies to rapidly adjust to changing survival conditions. There is a possibility that the concept is not novel; instead, it has been around for a considerable number of decades, and it continues to acquire relevance. Higher education institutions need to embed and indoctrinate the modern continuous learning principles (with or without artificial intelligence) with robust dialogue and inquiry competence at the individual academic level that many corporate bodies have incorporated into their system and developed into robust winning cultures. On the other hand, many people on the learning journey have already taken steps to establish the dynamic culture of the learning company. There have been several discussions over the principles, models, and best practices of learning organizations as opposed to organizational learning archives in management databases. The purpose of this article is not to persist in the discussion of opinions that are different from one another. With that being said, Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) provide a robust and outstanding method of diagnosing learning organizations with magnificent dimensions that have practical meanings. Thus, it serves as the conceptual model for accomplishing the study goals. Learning is a continuous process that is strategically exploited and integrated with and operates parallel to work, according to Watkins and Marsick (1993). A learning organization learns continually and evolves itself, which mirrors the higher education institutions.

Research has been conducted in several studies to investigate how learning organization practices and processes impact organizational performance and produce positive correlations. Most of the studies were conducted in the business sector, where the most important incentives were maximizing profits and increasing shareholder value. More bureaucratic and subject to stricter regulatory norms, the public sector, which includes higher education institutions, is always seen to be more bureaucratic than the private corporate sector, functioning with a mission for sustainable business profitability. A structure with rigid and tight operations may make it challenging to acquire knowledge that goes beyond the limits of the activities employees can do for a day. On the other hand, public sector organizations have implemented many control systems to reduce the likelihood of mistakes occurring. According to Palos and Stancovici’s (2016) study, self-contained companies can incorporate learning organization features more than public sector organizations.

On the other hand, Bhaskar and Mishra (2017) support the idea that learning organizational aspects impacts monetary values and advances knowledge. This is about a sample taken from an organization that operates in the public sector. This research supports the idea that it is plausible to apply learning organization characteristics that begin from individual learning with inquiry and dialogue in public organizations judged to be bureaucratic, as well as the consequences linked with this. The investigation into whether or not the findings are relevant to the setting of Malaysian public higher education institutions is noteworthy. It is arguable if the arguments made in the preceding about the flexibility of corporate organizations and the rigidity of public sector organizations in limiting effectiveness and efficiencies are valid in the context of higher education institutions.

Earlier studies frequently criticized public organizations for their incapacity to evolve into learning

organizations and showcase their best model (Jamali et al., 2009). This criticism was based on the fact that public organizations frequently took more bureaucratic roles. A subject that has to be addressed and studied is whether or not something still exists now, focusing on the impact of individual learning with dialogue and inquiry competence built within the institutions. Higher education institutions open to the public require more examination to prove their advancing nature, parallel to learning organization. Thus, these are best showcased with empirical data. The concept of continuous learning with dialogue and inquiry is no longer only a philosophy; instead, it has been put into reality in every entity or business. The principles of bureaucracy are essential when it comes to maintaining specific workflows and procedures. Higher education institutions function in a manner that is a combination of bureaucratic and open systems, with the former being more prevalent. Higher education institutions are forced to pursue the realities of the world to fulfil their obligations to the people of their country. Regarding workplace learning, there is no universally applicable plan; the notion that a single approach is suitable for everyone is still a subject of debate (Ortenblad, 2015).

As a consequence of this, every company needs to develop its unique strategy for learning activities that take place in the workplace. Higher education institutions are learning organizations that closely monitor the external world and introduce change internally to maintain a comparable speed of digitalization technological, profitable, and communal innovations. This is to preserve a competitive advantage. This is because educational institutions such as colleges and universities are also a part of the terrain of revolutions today.

To achieve sustainable goals, the action imperatives framework that Watkins and Marsick presented in 1993 and 1996 investigates the degree to which the concepts of learning organizations are applicable in the real world. Indeed, the purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between the specific components of a learning organization, the provision of support from the higher education institution for continuous learning and encouragement for open dialogue and inquiry to build individual strengths and the impact those components have on behaviours that are creative in the workplace. This is crucial because academic community members participate, get involved and contribute individually at each innovation process level. As a result, they need to be aware of the influence of different individual learning levels, which encompasses continuous learning and dialogue and inquiry on total innovative behaviour. As a result, the research allows us to demonstrate the degree to which the sample organization (higher education institutions) conforms to the concept of a learning organization at the beginning phase – the individual learning level.

Academic institutions of higher learning would have a tough time making a profit if they did not receive tuition fees from students from within their country and other countries. As a consequence of the decline in both national income and corporate investment, public higher education institutions will also be required to make significant reductions to their operational budgets. During economic instability, enterprises, significantly higher education institutions, have been forced to restructure their operations to survive. In the most extreme cases, they are forced to close their doors from business permanently. When tackling the difficulties of continuing vigorous work behaviour in light of the reality of the contemporary workroom, we have trust in the administration of higher education institutions' capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn, as well as to design novel answers to such challenges. According to Liu et al. (2017) and similar to Shipton, Budhwar, Sparrow, and Brown (2017), environmental unpredictability is causing companies to undergo a transformation and laying the foundation for an innovative work culture that is beneficial to the company's performance. In order for educational institutions to maintain their place in contemporary society, they must constantly be ready to provide, instil, and satisfy the requirements of learners to be on par with the recent skills to champion workplace survival. It is anticipated that individuals in the workforce able to work effectively and efficiently and provide more meaningful outputs through advanced innovative work behaviour after higher education institutions have adopted the learning organization setup with superiority in

continuous learning with dialogue and inquiry competencies development and support. During their investigation, Ghasemzadeh, Nazari, Farzaneh, and Mehralian (2019) discovered a shortage of experiential study reports about the connection between creative culture output and learning companies. The writers highly suggest conducting more studies to reaffirm the previously asserted merits from a philosophical standpoint.

## **LEARNING ORGANIZATION, INDIVIDUAL LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR**

Just-in-time learning, learning how to learn, and informal learning are all examples of activities included in continuous learning. These activities entail making attempts to promote continuing learning through more successful planning. A continuous learning centre, desktop learning, global dialogues teams, developmental coaching related to career planning, and on-the-job learning experiences that include demanding work assignments and mentorship are some of the elements that may be included in these methods, as stated by Watkins and Marsick (1993). Furthermore, Watkins and Marsick (1996) argued that “Learning should be ongoing, used strategically, growing out of work itself” (p.5). Continuous education is how one acquires skills, knowledge, understanding, values, and the ability to express professional competencies. Leaders of higher education institutions need to make considerable investments in the education, training, and development of their personnel, and they should also make it possible for educators to further their careers and abilities via continuous learning and development. This aligns with the necessity of cultivating a culture that values learning. These kinds of encouragements are necessary to establish and foster a learning culture committed to collaboration and ongoing development. To meet these requirements, these establishments must give a wide range of chances for continuous learning as they work toward becoming learning organizations. Through the development of artificial intelligence and e-learning capabilities, it will also be possible to guarantee that every member of the staff, regardless of where they are, will have access to learning and development opportunities at all times. Despite this, educators should be willing to embrace more significant influence over their learning development. They should also be prepared to devote more time, effort, and financial resources to learning.

The purpose of discourse is to create a space for investigation. In this environment, individuals in the organization can develop a greater awareness of the context surrounding events and the thought and emotional processes that led to creating those experiences. Through constructive conversations, dialogue allows participants to defend and clarify their viewpoints regarding specific problems on the table. Considering this perspective, the power of communication is highlighted “by telling what is on one’s mind, asking questions about its impact, listening for reasoning in people’s answers, and keeping open to new viewpoints” (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p. 13). In addition, discussions are exploratory; hence, open communication becomes essential to recognize the latent potential in other people and then cultivate those skills in a relevant manner that delivers advantages for both the individuals involved and the business as a whole.

In their 1993 article, Watkins and Marsick asserted that inquiry “involves questioning that simultaneously challenges assumptions and yet does not attack the individual” (p.14). Action learning, action science, and conversation circles are some approaches that accomplish this objective (Watkins & Marsick, 1996). The purpose of discussion and inquiry is to encourage intellectual and professional activities, which in turn nurture the growth of members of the organization. Additionally, these activities can inspire inquiries and allow for the ability to argue disputes dispassionately, all while preserving collegial connections among all parties involved. As a result, it can potentially direct the members’ attention toward collective inquiry, which may result in the development of new ideas, portraying innovative work behaviour. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize that the inquiry and debate among the organization’s members must be founded on a robust feeling of mutual support and gain rather than on a sense of competitiveness that is not constructive.



Additionally, Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) argued that inquiry and discussion could not occur unless an atmosphere supported a developmental approach to learning. This approach acknowledges that making mistakes is a natural part of achieving excellent routing to innovative performance.

According to research conducted by Dedahanov et al. (2017), Janssen (2004), Liu et al. (2017), Shipton et al. (2017), and Scott and Bruce (1994), employees are more likely to be engaged in innovative work behaviour when they have personal and organizational characteristics that are favourable. The culture of a learning company is one that quickly accepts change (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996) that goes beyond individual learning and supports learning by doing (Janssen, 2004; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Furthermore, Liu et al. (2017) said that scholars in the field of organization and management demonstrate strong evidence of cultural change, innovative behaviour, and diversified organizational performance. In the 1980s, businesses realized that learning could improve their performance, competitiveness, and overall success (Marquardt, 1996). Senge's work from 1990 was a significant step forward when he introduced the concept of learning organization. According to Gentle and Clifton (2017), the features of a learning organization are gradually connected with the outcomes of individuals, groups, and the organization from the beginning (O'Brien et al., 2019). It is vital to enrich the corpus of evidence on the impacts of learning organization dimensions with outcome measures such as innovative work behaviour to show how the concepts develop, are applied, and assessed in various scenarios. The authors Ahmad et al. (2017) claim that a learning organization is constantly learning by offering learning environments that are both innovative and progressive.

Over twenty years ago, Ulrich (1998) suggested that quick knowledge acquisition, competency grooming, and best practices are decisive success drivers for individuals and enterprises. In a world where creativity, competence, and inventive work behaviour are the lifeblood of success, it is essential to remember that these factors are crucial success drivers. As a means of preparing students to meet the requirements of a variety of interconnected businesses, higher education institutions are being established. Amabile et al. (1996) and Hurley and Hult (1998) found that toward the end of the 20th century, creativity and innovative organization survival remained continually associated with the learning culture as a supportive environment. Ghaffari et al. (2017) confirmed the existence of a learning culture in their research on Malaysian public higher education institutions. The study focused on the individual, team, and organizational levels. A further point to consider is that creative work behaviour, like inventive culture, does not occur in isolated compartments. That being said, the innovative work behaviour construct, which includes idea development, promotion, and implementation (Janssen, 2003), takes place at every level of the business. Ghasemzadeh et al. (2019) and Watkins and Marsick (1993, 1996) found that cultivating a learning culture with particular characteristics leads to increased creative organizational behaviour.

Through their research, Acevedo and Diaz-Molina (2022) reaffirm that a learning culture is rooted in innovative work principles when organizations create an environment that supports learning opportunities at all levels. This is in response to the claims made by Ghasemzadeh et al. (2019), who assert that an innovative culture is built upon a superior learning culture. Aminbeidokhti et al. (2016), Hao and Yunlong (2014), and Sutanto (2017) are some examples of other research that were examined and found to yield favourable results regarding the beneficial effect of learning culture on creativity in higher education institutions. Although the literature is, to a certain extent, rich with information on many-sided innovative work behaviour, there is a profound need to grasp the innovative work behaviour techniques that are utilized in higher education institutions (Musenze & Mayende, 2022). The researchers were motivated to undertake that innovative work behaviour would be at its height in the learning culture at higher education institutions, as shown by the previous study, as well as the desire to maintain the vitality of the body of knowledge. Taking into consideration the reasoning that has been presented by both academics and professionals

working on the subject of organizational behaviour, psychology and human resource development research, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Continuous learning significantly affects innovative work behaviour.

H2 Inquiry and dialogue significantly affect innovative work behaviour.

## METHODOLOGY

Continuous learning (Clearn) and inquiry and dialogue (Dinquiry), the two dimensions of the learning organization, were measured using the validated instrument by Watkins and Marsick (1997). Almost twenty years after the research and validation procedure was carried out by Yang (2003), Yang et al. (2004), and Marsick and Watkins (2003), the instrument was also met with a great deal of good feedback. According to Kortsch and Kauffeld (2019), the numerous empirical studies published in reputable publications are evidence of the effectiveness of the measures, and they continue to be of great interest to researchers and practitioners in the field of currently available organization development. The two constructs were measured using three items for each. On the other hand, the innovative work behaviour measures were adopted from the work of Janssen (2000), which comprised nine measurement items. Three hundred sixty-six valid survey responses were collected using self-administered questionnaires delivered through the online survey. Professors serving Malaysian public HEIs were the target respondents. The study used Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypotheses. All the survey instruments were validated and proven reliable, with reliability scores above the 0.70 statistical threshold value.

## FINDINGS

Before performing the test of the measurement model, the collinearity test was executed, and the result showed that the value of the variance inflation factor was 1.333 and was within the acceptable threshold value of less than 5.0. Indeed, it indicates that the Common Method Bias is absent, and the data is adequate for further statistical analysis. Internal consistency reliability (CR), convergent validity (outer loading), and AVE were assessed based on the rules of thumb suggested by Hair et al. (2017). The measurement model test showed that Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and factor loadings (Figure 2) were higher than 0.708. The average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity also showed values higher than 0.50 (refer to Table 1). Thus, the measurement reached convergent reliability. Similarly, the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) showed less than 0.90 (Figure 1), indicating that discriminant validity was achieved. The measurement model met all the criteria for a good fit and is apposite for hypothesis testing.

Table 2: Reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CLearn	0.868	0.870	0.919	0.791
DInquiry	0.905	0.906	0.941	0.841
IWBehaviour	0.948	0.965	0.954	0.698

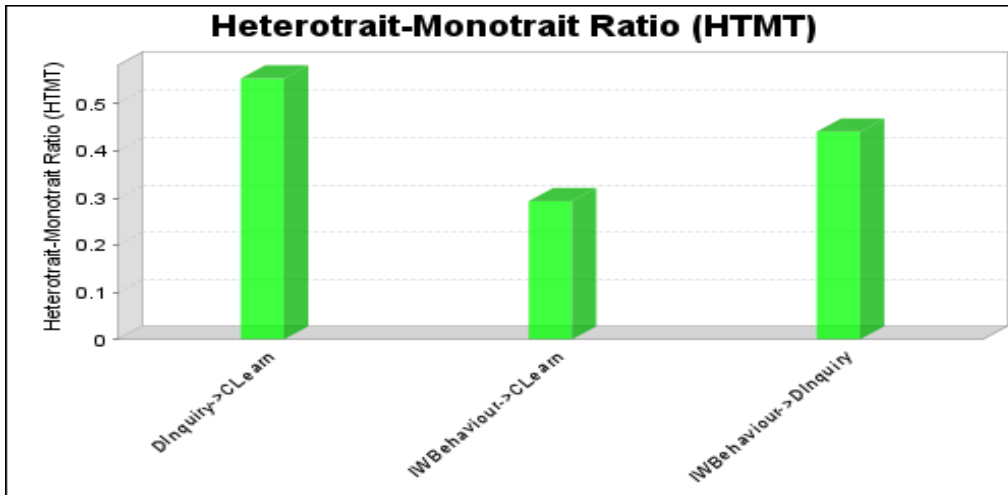


Figure 1: HTMT test for Discriminant Validity

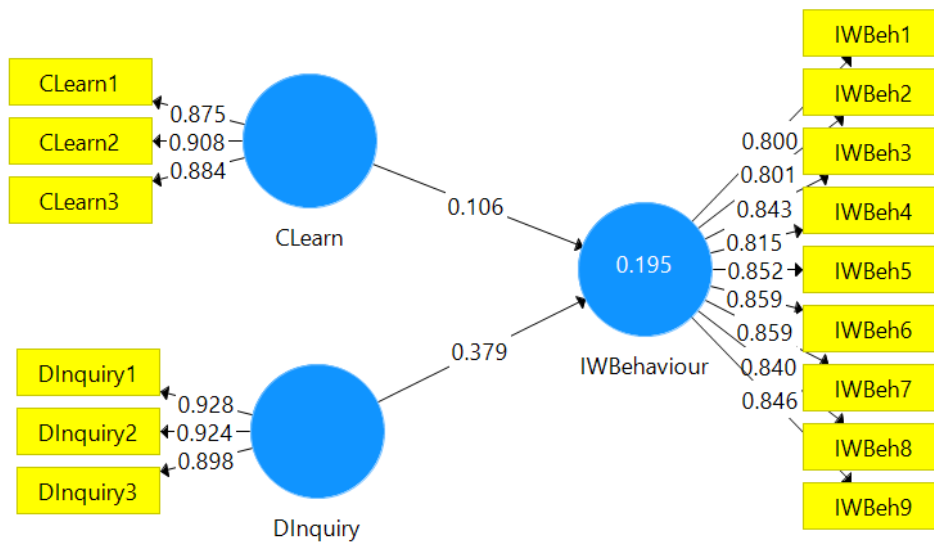


Figure 2: Measurement Model

Path coefficients among the latent variables, continuous learning, inquiry and dialogue, and innovative work behaviour of the structural models in Table 2 lead to decisions for the study’s hypotheses. The direct effect of continuous learning systems connection (SC) ( $\beta = 0.106$ ,  $t = 1.961$ ,  $p > 0.001$ ) on innovative work behaviour was insignificant. Regarding inquiry and dialogue ( $\beta = 0.379$ ,  $t = 7.551$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), it significantly affects innovative work behaviour.

Table 2: Path coefficients

Path/ Hypothesis	Beta	T-value	P-value	2.50%	97.50%	Decision
CLearn -> IWBehaviour	0.106	1.961	0.050	-0.005	0.202	Reject
DInquiry -> IWBehaviour	0.379	7.551	0.000	0.278	0.477	Accept

Table 3 shows that dimensions of the learning organization, continuous learning, inquiry, and dialogue explain 19.5 % variance in innovative work behaviour. The percentage seems small, but Cohen (1988) suggested that an R square value of 0.195 is within the moderate range for endogenous latent variables. The f-square value is 0.011 for the path continues learning-innovative work behaviour and 0.135 for the path inquiry and dialogue-innovative work behaviour. This signifies that continuous learning does not affect innovative work behaviour, and inquiry and dialogue significantly affect innovative work behaviour. The judgment follows the effect size ( $\geq 0.02$  is small;  $\geq 0.15$  is medium;  $\geq 0.35$  is large) by Cohen (1988). The blindfolding procedure is used to get the Q Square value. The two constructs of the individual learning levels were more extensive than 0, indicating that the models have predictive relevance.

Table 3: Outcome of the model fit test

Construct	R-square	f-square	Q-square
CLearn -> IWBehaviour	<b>0.195</b> (Moderate)	0.011 (no effect)	<b>0.122</b>
DInquiry -> IWBehaviour		0.135 (large effect)	

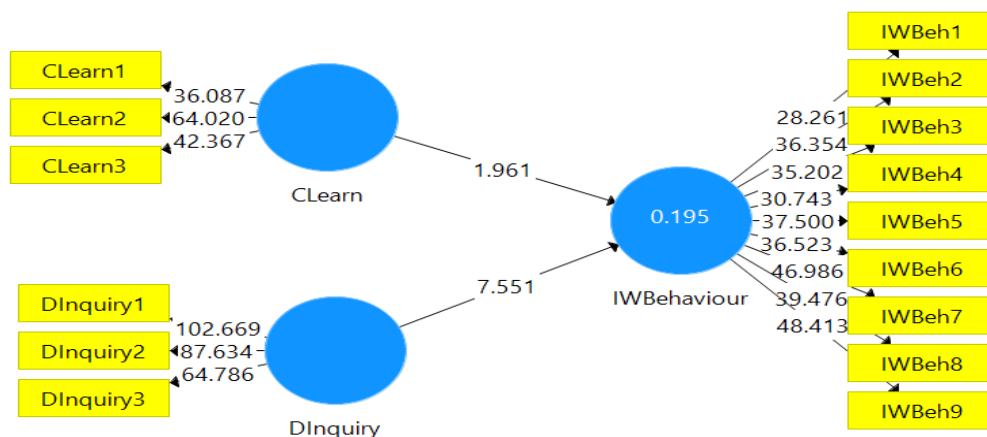


Figure 2: Structural model

## CONCLUSION

This study used the six items extracted from the DLOQ (Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Yang, 2003; Yang et al., 2004) to identify the effects of continuous learning and inquiry and dialogue on innovative work behaviour in Malaysian public higher education institutions. The respondents are academic professors. Higher education institutions of all kinds and sizes must always incorporate instructional material that is constantly developing in response to the economy, society, and technology requirements. Because society operates in an open system, it can get more in-depth knowledge about the present and future demands. As a result, there has been an increase in the requests for higher education institutions to provide a more current curriculum and guarantee quality education. The public higher education institutions in Malaysia have constantly received support from internal and external stakeholders to expand educational opportunities. For higher education institutions of all sizes, including small, medium, and big, the task of maintaining outstanding standards via creative and innovative work while cultivating top talent is continuous. To



continue to provide education of the highest possible quality, higher education institutions in Malaysia must prioritize innovation. Creative behaviour is necessary in the workplace, and the solution lies in operating as a reputable learning enterprise.

The interdependency of higher education institutions and manifolds of industrial revolutions inevitably lead to advancement for human living beyond the knowledge economy. The higher education institutions have strategic plans to reconfigure education policy and increase relevance to global economic demands. Thus, this research addresses the role of individual levels of learning within the framework of learning organization in creating creative work behaviour promptly. The respondents believe that the two dimensions of the learning organization, continuous learning and inquiry and dialogue, substantially impact innovative work behaviour. Besides, it is undeniable that learning happens at the individual level, and nurturing a superior learning culture will help higher education institutions strategically align their resources to enhance personal learning and achieve sustainable, innovative work behaviour among their staff. The research findings are evidence that there are traces of good governance and learning orientations in Malaysian higher education institutions that enable and promote inquiry and dialogue competence to survive with differentiated educational provisions. The quick change in how all work is performed at higher education institutions in response to the recent global COVID-19 pandemic proves that constant learning opportunities are available with a perfect attitude towards inquiry, and dialogue is to be well commended. Consistency and persistent reminders help build their future by discovering opportunities through networks of learning–system connections. Indeed, having a solid system that connects organizational members to the outside society helps in inquiry and dialogue to create a structure that adapts to the changes in society’s demands. Information and knowledge remain critical to further educational goals, implementing direction and making a gainful functional level of decisions.

The call to support action issued by the learning organization extended to all stakeholders whose responsibility is to ensure that graduates retain a sense of gratitude for their educational experience. It is interesting to support higher education institutions that consistently engage in learning and bring respectful change decisions that affect workplace innovation. Through continuous learning and superior inquiry and dialogue among the employees, valuable ideas are generated, and vision motivates the Malaysian public higher education institutions and the feeling of ownership over work, essential to the modernized work culture. Inquiry and dialogue speak loudly on this matter. It is challenging to show reasons not to study workplace innovation in the future. The readily available learning organization action imperative model enables enduring learning in higher education institutions. Watkins and Marsick (1993) designed a learning organization framework that has gained tremendous acceptance and has been associated with many outcomes, such as innovative work behaviour. Learning at the individual level and processes are fostered to accelerate the learning culture. The learning organization concept is not new; the reality has become more appealing in the past decades, has shown significant success in empirical shreds of evidence, and is parallel to the operation philosophy of higher education institutions. The findings of this study can be generalized but have some limitations. Future studies are encouraged to look at the learning culture in private institutions, compare the results with those of public institutions, and help enrich the body of knowledge using the seven action imperatives, a well-tested framework. The statistical procedures support the strength of the shorter version of the DLOQ in measuring the individual dimensions, levels of learning and overall learning culture. This study concurs with the standing of Kortsch and Kauffeld (2019), who states that the dimensions of the learning organization questionnaire are multi-dimensional. Thus, using the robust instrument, it is worth gauging learning culture in higher education institutions and other business and non-business settings.

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