Psychological and Social Determinants of Innovative Work Behaviour and Lecturer Productivity in Malaysian Higher Education: A Critical Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract: This conceptual work-in-progress paper critically examines how self-leadership, self-efficacy and knowledge sharing may shape innovative work behaviour (IWB) and lecturer productivity in Malaysian higher education. Drawing on self-leadership theory, Social Cognitive Theory and knowledge-sharing scholarship, it distinguishes self-regulatory strategies from perceived capability and interpersonal knowledge exchange. A focused narrative synthesis develops four propositions and identifies institutional conditions that may enable or constrain their operation. IWB is considered a possible mechanism connecting these resources with teaching, research and service performance, rather than a demonstrated mediator. The paper offers a theory-informed explanation and an agenda for empirical investigation; it does not report new survey results.

Keywords: Self-Leadership; Self-Efficacy; Knowledge Sharing; Innovative Work Behaviour; Lecturer Productivity

1. Introduction

Universities increasingly expect lecturers to innovate while delivering teaching, research, supervision and institutional service. Innovative work behaviour (IWB) involves generating, promoting and implementing ideas that can improve work practices (Anderson et al., 2014; Janssen, 2000). These behaviours may be especially important when lecturers adapt pedagogy, collaborate across disciplines or address changing student needs. Yet innovation consumes time, requires collegial support and does not inevitably improve measured performance.

The explanation of academic innovation must therefore go beyond listing positive personal qualities. Self-leadership concerns how individuals direct their conduct; self-efficacy concerns judgments of their capability; and knowledge sharing concerns access to expertise through interaction. Although related, these mechanisms are conceptually different. Treating them as interchangeable risks obscuring why a confident lecturer might not innovate, or why a supportive department might still lack implementation capacity.

This paper asks how psychological and social resources may jointly support IWB and lecturer productivity, and where their effects might be limited. Its contribution is a critical interpretation of theoretical mechanisms and boundary conditions, rather than a claim to a new tested model. The Malaysian higher education setting motivates the discussion, but the propositions remain untested in this paper.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Critical Synthesis

2.1 Self-Leadership: Regulating Action

Self-leadership theory describes strategies through which individuals influence their own motivation and behaviour, including self-observation, goal setting, self-reward and constructive thinking (Houghton & Neck, 2002; Manz, 1986). In academic work these strategies may help lecturers initiate curriculum improvements, reserve time for scholarly experimentation and sustain action despite competing demands. Self-leadership is not, however, simply personal enthusiasm: it involves deliberate regulation of behaviour toward goals.

Its limitations also matter. A lecturer may set ambitious innovation goals without authority to change assessment, resources to trial technology or time to develop an idea. Accordingly, individual self-direction is more likely to yield implementation when institutional procedures leave meaningful discretion. This distinction guards against attributing structural barriers to individual motivation alone.

2.2 Social Cognitive Theory: Capability Within Context

Bandura's (1997) account of self-efficacy addresses perceived capability to organise and execute actions. In Social Cognitive Theory, personal factors, behaviour and environmental influences interact reciprocally; the theory is not reducible to motivation or a one-way effect of confidence on performance. This paper applies that perspective to lecturer innovation rather than claiming to supersede Bandura's theoretical contribution.

Self-efficacy may encourage lecturers to attempt unfamiliar teaching methods, advocate ideas and persist after unsuccessful trials. Nevertheless, high confidence does not guarantee the quality of an idea or the institutional permission required to implement it. Moreover, successful experimentation may subsequently strengthen efficacy beliefs. Self-leadership and self-efficacy therefore complement each other: the former describes strategies for directing action, whereas the latter concerns expectations about being able to act.

2.3 Knowledge Sharing: Social Access and Reciprocity

Knowledge sharing introduces an interpersonal dimension. It involves exchanging expertise, experiences and information that colleagues may use to solve problems and develop ideas (Bock et al., 2005; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Seminars, peer mentoring, joint research and informal discussion may provide criticism and practical assistance unavailable through solitary self-regulation. Shared knowledge may also help lecturers avoid repeating ineffective practices.

Yet more sharing is not necessarily better: irrelevant information, low trust, weak reciprocity or limited capacity to apply advice can restrict benefits. Collaborative exchange creates an opportunity for innovation, not an automatic outcome. Because university departments differ in norms, workloads and support, this social mechanism must be examined alongside individual capabilities and working conditions.

3. Conceptual Development and Propositions

IWB spans idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation (Janssen, 2000). These stages draw on somewhat different resources. Developing ideas may demand reflection and exploration; promoting them can require confidence and collegial endorsement; implementation often depends on discretion, coordination and time. Four propositions summarise the theoretically anticipated relationships.

- Proposition 1: Self-leadership is positively associated with lecturers' IWB because goal setting and monitoring may turn intentions into sustained experimentation. This association may weaken under excessive workload or restricted autonomy.
- Proposition 2: Self-efficacy is positively associated with lecturers' IWB because perceived capability may encourage risk-taking, idea advocacy and persistence. Its influence should be distinguished from actual competence and available resources.
- Proposition 3: Knowledge sharing is positively associated with lecturers' IWB because feedback and access to expertise may improve idea refinement and coordination. The relationship may depend on trust, relevance and opportunities to apply knowledge.
- Proposition 4: IWB is positively associated with lecturer productivity when implemented ideas improve teaching, research or service outcomes. Novelty alone is insufficient: productivity requires appropriately defined and observable gains.

Together, these propositions suggest a possible explanatory pathway from psychological and social resources through IWB to lecturer productivity. They do not establish mediation or causality. Reciprocal influences should also be considered: a successful innovation might increase efficacy, while supportive climates may encourage both knowledge sharing and experimentation. The paper thus treats IWB as a candidate mechanism whose empirical importance depends on context and measurement.

4. Conceptual Approach and Empirical Research Agenda

This paper adopts a focused narrative synthesis of foundational scholarship selected for its direct relevance to the five constructs and their proposed relationships. It is not a systematic review or a secondary analysis of thesis data; no new survey, participant sample, statistical results or formal effect estimates are presented. Accordingly, sections that would imply completed empirical findings have been replaced by conceptual propositions and limitations.

A future empirical test should define the target population as lecturers working in Malaysian higher education institutions and state eligibility criteria, public/private institutional coverage, recruitment routes and sampling justification. The report should disclose the number invited and responding, survey mode and dates, informed consent, ethics arrangements and missing-data procedures. Such transparency is particularly important if voluntary or purposive recruitment limits representativeness.

Potential measures include the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (Houghton & Neck, 2002), a suitably justified self-efficacy measure such as Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), knowledge-sharing items informed by Bock et al. (2005), and Janssen's (2000) IWB instrument. Lecturer productivity must be defined in relation to teaching, research and service using justified indicators, rather than assuming that one index captures all three domains. Instrument adaptation and language suitability should be documented.

Analysis could begin with descriptive statistics and assessment of measurement reliability and validity before evaluating the proposed paths. Depending on research design, a justified structural equation modelling approach could assess internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, collinearity and indirect effects with confidence intervals. Cross-sectional self-reports would not establish causation and could be affected by common-method bias. Longitudinal or multi-source evidence would strengthen conclusions.

There are also important design choices for future testing. Behavioural self-reports of innovation may capture intentions more readily than implemented improvements, and productivity indicators can privilege research publication counts over teaching or service quality. Researchers should distinguish intermediate activities from outcomes, test whether proposed associations vary by institutional type or career stage, and avoid interpreting statistically significant pathways as proof of practical importance. Comparisons across disciplines should account for differences in scholarly outputs and opportunities to innovate.

A further issue is theoretical direction. Social Cognitive Theory allows efficacy beliefs to be reinforced by experiences of achievement; likewise, innovative experiences may produce new knowledge-sharing relationships. A future design measuring constructs at different time points would be better suited to distinguishing these reciprocal accounts than a single questionnaire. This matters because a cross-sectional association between IWB and productivity could equally reflect productive lecturers having greater access to opportunities for innovation.

5. Discussion and Implications

The theoretical synthesis challenges a purely individualistic interpretation of innovation. Lecturers can regulate their work and feel capable, but still require collegial exchange and institutional capacity to bring ideas into practice. Equally, knowledge exchange may remain superficial when individuals lack time, efficacy or permission to act. The distinctive contribution of this paper lies in clarifying these complementary and potentially constraining mechanisms, not in asserting statistically verified relationships.

For university leaders, a tentative implication is to combine professional development in self-management with peer-learning structures and space for responsible experimentation. Evaluation should focus on whether implemented changes improve meaningful academic outcomes rather than counting ideas alone. These recommendations are provisional and should not be presented as effects demonstrated by this paper.

6. Conclusion

Self-leadership, self-efficacy and knowledge sharing offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on lecturer innovation. This conceptual analysis develops testable propositions while highlighting reciprocal influences, institutional constraints and the need to define productivity carefully. Empirical investigation is required before claiming that IWB mediates relationships or improves lecturer performance in Malaysia.

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