

**ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF BUSINESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND SMES
(AIJBES)**www.gaexcellence.com/aijbess**WHAT DRIVES ACADEMICS' ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMITMENT? EVIDENCE FROM MALAYSIAN PUBLIC
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Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 30.07.2026

Revised date: 24.08.2026

Accepted date: 23.09.2026

Published date: 30.09.2026

To cite this document:

Safin, S. Z., Harudin, S., Mahshar, M., & Jamlurus, H. L. (2026). What Drives Academics' Organizational Commitment? Evidence From Malaysian Public Universities. *Advanced International Journal of Business Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, 8 (29), 1940-1954.

Abstract:

Organizational commitment matters in higher education because academics' attachment to their institutions shapes their willingness to fulfill institutional responsibilities and remain with their universities. Prior research has largely examined organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice as isolated predictors of commitment; however, their combined influence remains underexplored. Investigating these combined organizational factors is essential in Malaysian public universities, where fostering commitment requires aligning career growth, institutional support, and workplace fairness. Therefore, grounded by Social Exchange Theory, this study examines the impact of organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice on academics' organizational commitment, as well as the moderating role of networking behaviour. This study employed a quantitative approach and a correlational research design, and data were collected from academics at public universities who met the predetermined eligibility criteria. 508 complete responses were obtained, data screening was conducted, and only 457 usable responses were retained. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that organizational career growth ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 4.699$, $p < 0.001$), perceived organizational support ($\beta = 0.163$, $t =$

3.000, $p = 0.001$), and organizational justice ($\beta = 0.271$, $t = 4.656$, $p < 0.001$) had a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. However, networking behaviour showed no moderating effect on the relationship between organizational factors and organizational commitment. Organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice independently drive organizational commitment, demonstrating that individual networking does not alter the impact of these organizational factors. These insights offer actionable strategies for Malaysian public university administrators and policymakers.

DOI: 10.35631/AIJBS.829111

Keyword:

Malaysian Public Universities, Networking Behaviour, Organizational Career Growth, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Justice, Perceived Organizational Support.



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Introduction

Organizational commitment represents the degree to which employees align with institutional values and feel a personal connection to their organization. Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) define organizational commitment through the framework of Social Exchange Theory, conceptualizing it as an attitudinal outcome that reflects an employee's strong sense of identification with, emotional attachment to, and involvement in their organization

For academics, organizational commitment is especially relevant because their commitment to their work directly shapes their attachment to, and concern for, making effective contributions to the higher education industry. Chen et al. (2024), drawing on 30 empirical studies, not only identified organizational commitment as one of the top concerns among higher education academics but also demonstrated the effects of organizational support, managerial effectiveness, and work environment on academics' commitment. Likewise, Ramli and Salleh (2025) in Malaysia found that organizational commitment was significantly related to academics' turnover intention in private higher education institutions.

However, little is known about the causes of organizational commitment among academics in higher education. For instance, Chen et al. (2024) found that prior research was limited in both depth and breadth, particularly in the context of higher education. Thus, this study investigates three organizational factors: organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice.

Although these factors have been linked to organizational commitment, research has largely examined them individually or across different organizational contexts (Chen et al., 2024). These specific variables were chosen because prior studies have only investigated them separately. Specifically, prior studies have separately demonstrated that organizational career growth (Al Balushi et al., 2022; Barakat & Ghani, 2021), perceived organizational support (Moon & Choi, 2017; Pattnaik et al., 2020), and organizational justice (Hamzah et al., 2020; Dorji & Kaur, 2019) independently influence organizational commitment. Additionally, research focusing on career growth and progression for academics remains underdeveloped (Bossu et al., 2019; Weng & Zhu, 2020). Moreover, the higher education sector continues to lack sufficient investigation into perceived organizational support (Thevanes & Saranraj, 2018) and organizational justice (Hnat et al., 2015; Park, 2018). Therefore, more investigation is needed to determine how organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice collectively relate to academics' organizational commitment.

This study introduced networking behaviour as the moderating variable. Networking behaviour is defined as employees' actions to build and maintain formal relationships with others who may be able to provide assistance and support for work and career development (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Porter & Woo, 2015). Relevant to the current study, prior research has indicated that internal networking behaviour is associated with organizational commitment (McCallum et al., 2014; Wanigasekara et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the moderating effect of networking behaviour on the proposed relationships among organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, organizational justice, and organizational commitment of higher education academics remains underexplored.

Theoretical insights from Social Exchange Theory suggest that favorable organizational conditions induce felt obligation and commitment, with networking behaviour acting as an individual resource strategy that potentially strengthens these social exchange relationships. Therefore, this study tests the impact of organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice on organizational commitment, as well as the moderating effect of networking behaviour among academicians at Malaysian public universities.

Literature Review

The literature review discusses the relationships between organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, organizational justice, and organizational commitment among academics in Malaysian public universities.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is particularly important in the education sector because academics are central to the delivery of teaching, research, supervision, and institutional responsibilities. Recent evidence confirms that academics' organizational commitment is influenced by organizational factors, including organizational support, managerial effectiveness, and the work environment (Chen et al., 2024).

The importance of organizational commitment is further demonstrated in Malaysian higher education. Ramli and Salleh (2025), for example, examined academics in Malaysian private higher education institutions and found that organizational commitment was relevant in explaining academics' turnover intentions. Similarly, Hashim et al. (2020) demonstrated a

positive and significant relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment among academics at three Malaysian public universities. They discovered that stronger learning-oriented practices in universities lead to a greater level of academic staff's organizational commitment. This result shows that organizational commitment remains a major outcome in the higher education context.

Organizational Career Growth

Employees' career development, career opportunities, and organizational involvement are the factors included in organizational career growth (Al Balushi et al., 2022). It involves career goal advancement, development of professional capabilities, promotion speed, and salary growth. Hence, organizational career growth represents organizational investment in employees' career development and advancement. For this study, organizational career growth follows the definitions by Weng et al. (2010) and Weng & McElroy (2012): it refers to employees' advancement within their current organization, including career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth.

Employees may reciprocate their commitment to the organization through positive work attitudes (Blau, 1964), as explained by Social Exchange Theory. Employees demonstrate their commitment to their organization after achieving organizational career growth (e.g., career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth). Al Balushi et al. (2022) found that organizational career growth significantly influenced organizational commitment. In line with this perspective, Barakat et al. (2021) reported a positive relationship between organizational career growth and organizational commitment among academics at Jordanian public universities. Wang & Abu Hasan (2024), on the other hand, further identified organizational career growth as an important area for research and called for greater attention to its organizational-level influences. From this, it can be concluded that organizational career growth is a relevant antecedent in explaining academics' organizational commitment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Organizational career growth has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.

Perceived Organizational Support

In this study, perceived organizational support is defined as the extent to which employees believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Blau (1964) and Eisenberger et al. (1986) stated that, according to Social Exchange Theory, employees who feel supported by their organization may be more committed in return.

A previous study by Pattnaik et al. (2020) found that perceived organizational support significantly influenced organizational commitment, while Moon and Choi (2017) reported a positive and significant relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. Ahmad et al. (2020), on the other hand, indicate a significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment among Malaysian government employees. According to Chen et al. (2024), organizational support is an important external factor associated with academics' organizational commitment in the higher-education literature. These findings support the relevance of perceived

organizational support as an antecedent of academics' organizational commitment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived organizational support has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.

Organizational Justice

Greenberg (1990) and Colquitt (2012) defined organizational justice as employees' perceptions of the fairness of organizational policies, practices, and outcomes. Organizational justice includes distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice concerns the equity of outcomes, while procedural justice concerns the equity of decision-making; and, finally, interactional justice concerns how employees are treated by one another (Cropanzano et al., 2002).

Employees who perceive fair treatment may reciprocate with a stronger commitment to their organization, as suggested by Social Exchange Theory. Colquitt et al. (2001) found positive associations between distributive justice and affective commitment and between procedural justice and affective and normative commitment. Jameel et al. (2020) reported a positive and significant relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment among teachers. In addition, Gonzales et al. (2024) found that distributive justice significantly influenced affective commitment, while Ho (2025) reported positive associations between several justice dimensions and affective commitment. As such, organizational justice represents another relevant antecedent of organizational commitment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Organizational justice has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.

Moderating Role of Networking Behaviour

Networking behaviour refers to employees' actions to establish and sustain professional connections with individuals who can provide assistance or support for work and career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Networking provides employees with access to information, resources, support, and professional opportunities (Porter & Woo, 2015). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), employment relationships depend on the mutual exchange of workplace resources, in which proactive career actions, such as networking behavior, serve as individual-level strategies that enhance these reciprocal resource exchanges between employees and their organizations (Chaudhry, 2024). Networking behaviours reflect an employee's deliberate efforts to cultivate relational ties with colleagues and managers, thereby acquiring vital social capital and organizational benefits (Wanigasekara et al., 2026). Networking behaviour is relevant to organizational commitment because internal networking has been positively associated with organizational commitment (McCallum et al., 2014; Wanigasekara et al., 2023). However, evidence concerning its role as a moderator remains limited, particularly in higher education. Existing research has examined networking behavior as a moderator in other organizational relationships. Barber and Werner (2024) provided evidence that professional networking can minimize the negative effects of burnout on commitment. Therefore, testing networking behaviour as a moderator offers an opportunity to determine whether the strength of the relationships among organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, organizational justice, and organizational commitment varies with academics' networking behaviour. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Networking behaviour moderates the relationship between organizational career growth and organizational commitment.

H5: Networking behaviour moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment.

H6: Networking behaviour moderates the relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the influence of organizational factors on academics' organizational commitment. The study targeted permanent Malaysian academics in public universities holding grades DM/DS45 to DM/DS53/54, which currently correspond to SSPA grades DS11, DS13, and DS14, respectively. As part of the predetermined criteria for eligibility, respondents were required to be Malaysian citizens, hold at least a master's degree, be in permanent employment, and have at least 3 years of academic experience. The predetermined criteria were imposed to ensure that respondents had sufficient experience to develop and evaluate their attachment and commitment to the organization. Academics with a minimum of three years of service were considered to have experienced the institution's policies, work environment, organizational practices, and career-related processes, which can lead to organizational commitment.

16 Malaysian public universities were granted permission to participate in this study, with a population of 17,084 academics. Purposive sampling was employed because the study required a specific group aligned with the predetermined eligibility criteria. Approximately 5,648 questionnaires were distributed through the official university email and through internal university administrative units. A total of 508 complete responses were obtained. 51 were removed during data screening: 2 for failing eligibility criteria, 1 for response misconduct (standard deviation < 0.25), 13 as multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis Distance, $p < 0.001$), and 35 for inconsistent responses. Consequently, 457 usable questionnaires remained for analysis. Data was gathered through online distribution. The survey consists of 43 questionnaire items adapted from previously validated instruments, along with 4 marker variable items to assess common method variance. A seven-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree," was used in the questionnaire. Table 1 demonstrates the summary of the questionnaire design. Before data collection, the questionnaire items were reviewed by two academics specialized in Human Resource Management, followed by a pretest from the target population. The pretest confirmed the clarity and suitability of the questionnaire.

Data were initially coded and screened using SPSS Version 29. Data cleaning included tests for missing values, response errors, and outliers. No missing values were identified because all questionnaire items were mandatory. Multivariate outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis Distance. Cognitive bias was examined using a theoretically unrelated marker variable: "cognitive rigidity." After partialling out the marker variable, the R^2 difference was 0.003, which is below the 10% threshold, indicating no substantial common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Subsequently, SmartPLS 4 was employed for PLS-SEM analysis because of its suitability for complex models, non-normal data, and relatively moderate sample sizes.

Table 1: Summary of Questionnaire Design

Variable	Dimension	Items	Source
Organizational commitment		6	Gould-Williams and Davies (2005)
Organizational career growth	1. Career goal progress 2. Professional ability development 3. Promotion speed 4. Remuneration growth.	15	Weng et al. (2010)
Perceived organizational support.		4	Silva et al. (2022)
Organizational justice	1. Procedural justice 2. Interactional justice 3. Distributive justice	15	Crow et al. (2012)
Networking behavior		3	Hirschi et al. (2017)
Cognitive rigidity		4	Oreg (2003)

Results

The study involved 457 academics from Malaysian public universities. The majority were female (72.6%), aged 36–45 years (57.1%), Malay (91.5%), and married (80.7%). Most respondents held a PhD (65.9%), were senior lecturers (67.0%), and occupied grades DS/DM51/52 (66.5%). The largest proportion of respondents had 11–15 years of academic experience (30.6%).

Assessing the Measurable Model

Evaluating the reflective measurement model begins with assessing indicator reliability, which measures the extent to which a latent construct accounts for the variance in its corresponding indicators (Hair et al., 2021; Ramayah et al., 2018). Outer loadings should ideally exceed 0.708, ensuring that the construct explains at least 50% of the indicator's variance (Ramayah et al., 2018), while items with loadings below 0.40 must be deleted from the model (Hair et al., 2022). Consequently, two questions measuring organizational commitment, items E4 (0.428) and E5 (0.275), were removed due to low loadings. Notably, both deleted items were reverse-coded questions within the organizational commitment scale. The measurement model demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability, with composite reliability values ranging from 0.746 to 0.955, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Measures of Internal Consistency

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Extracted (AVE)	Variance
Organizational commitment (OC)	0.713	0.746	0.536	
Career goals progress (CGP)	0.890	0.894	0.752	
Professional development (PAD)	0.883	0.883	0.741	
Promotional speed (PS)	0.828	0.825	0.667	
Remuneration growth (RG)	0.785	0.797	0.702	
Perceived organizational support (POS)	0.905	0.910	0.841	
Procedural justice (PJ)	0.867	0.872	0.654	
Interactional justice (IJ)	0.954	0.955	0.846	
Distributive justice (DJ)	0.904	0.908	0.724	
Networking behavior (NB)	0.828	0.836	0.744	

Assessing the Structural Model

The structural model showed that all three organizational factors had a significant positive influence on organizational commitment and explained 24.3% of its variance. Organizational career growth had a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 4.699$, $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.062$), supporting H1. This result is consistent with earlier research by Al Balushi et al. (2022), the employees are more likely to show greater organizational commitment when the organization promotes opportunities for career growth. Perceived organizational support also positively influenced organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 3.000$, $p = 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.020$), supporting H2. This finding corroborated previous research by scholars such as Firmansyah et al. (2022) and Pattnaik et al. (2020). Similarly, organizational justice had a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.271$, $t = 4.656$, $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.063$), thus supporting H3. This finding is supported by prior research by Hamzah et al. (2020), Jameel et al. (2020), and Rahman et al. (2016).

Contrary to expectations, the findings revealed that networking behaviour did not significantly moderate the relationships between organizational career growth ($\beta = -0.079$, $p = 0.214$), perceived organizational support ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.553$), and organizational justice ($\beta = -0.013$, $p = 0.847$) and academics' organizational commitment. This result may be related to the distinct context of Malaysian public universities compared with private-sector and entrepreneurial settings, where networking behavior is influential. Additionally, the relatively high age and organizational tenure of the respondents may indicate that they had already established professional networks, making networking behaviour less critical to their organizational commitment.

Therefore, H4, H5, and H6 were not supported. These findings differ from previous studies, which suggest that contextual factors can influence relationships involving career growth, organizational support, and organizational justice. Son and Kim (2019) found that organizational career growth significantly predicted career commitment through work

engagement, while Yang (2020) reported that social and coworker support influenced support–commitment relationships. Similarly, Tjahjono et al. (2019) found that social capital moderated the relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment. The differences between these findings and the present study may be attributed to variations in the research context and in the nature of the networking behaviour examined.

Discussion

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, direct organizational inducements such as transparent career growth, organizational support, and organizational justice exert a dominant impact on employee attitudes (Cropanzano et al., 2017). When academics perceive that their university provides strong organizational support and fair treatment, they feel a strong obligation to reciprocate with commitment. While this study confirms that organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice directly drive organizational commitment, its primary theoretical contribution lies in revealing the boundary conditions of networking behaviour. According to Chaudhry (2024) and Wanigasekara et al. (2026), past literature reveals that individual proactive actions, such as networking, amplify organizational resource exchanges. However, this study empirically demonstrated that networking behavior fails to moderate any of these relationships, offering key theoretical insights into Social Exchange Theory within public higher education.

Theoretical Contributions

This study has contributed insight to Social Exchange Theory and the organizational commitment literature. Firstly, while Social Exchange Theory suggests that individual proactive behaviors enhance workplace exchange relationships (Chaudhry, 2024), this study's results demonstrate that networking behavior neither alters nor strengthens the impact of core organizational resources on commitment, thereby establishing a critical boundary condition. Secondly, the findings indicate that direct organizational factors, including career growth, organizational support, and organizational justice, are fundamental in establishing an obligation for employees to reciprocate with commitment, irrespective of their individual networking efforts.

Practical Contributions

The study's contribution extends beyond theory to practical implications, specifically for university administrators and policymakers, as follows:

1. **Prioritizing Organizational Justice**

This study has proven that organizational justice is the strongest predictor of organizational commitment; thus, universities must lead with fairness. University administrators should implement transparent performance evaluations with clear processes and maintain equitable workload distribution. Policymakers should establish standardized, transparent promotion and compensation frameworks across public universities to remove institutional inconsistencies.

2. **Enhancing Organizational Career Growth**

University administrators should align their academic aspirations with university goals, offer structured mentorship, and provide skills workshops with transparent promotion roadmaps. Policymakers should adjust salary schemes based on qualifications and

experience, while tailoring key performance indicators (KPIs) to institutional missions (e.g., teaching quality vs. research outputs).

3. Strengthening Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

University administrators should maintain open communication, provide research funding, and offer flexible workloads to support work-life balance, demonstrating that the university cares about the well-being of its academic staff. Policymakers should allocate targeted funding for ongoing faculty training and cutting-edge technological infrastructure (such as sophisticated research systems).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, organizational factors (organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice) are essential determinants of organizational commitment among academics in Malaysian public universities. The findings demonstrate that clear progression pathways, supportive administrative practices, and fair workload and resource allocations initiate an obligation for academics to reciprocate by fostering organizational commitment. In contrast, networking behaviour showed no moderating effect on any of the relationships between organizational factors and organizational commitment. This finding establishes a vital theoretical boundary condition within Social Exchange Theory: individual networking efforts fail to alter or strengthen the impact of organizational factors (organizational career growth, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice) on organizational commitment. Malaysian public university administrators and policymakers must prioritize strengthening transparent career growth, institutional care, and procedural justice to cultivate a committed and successful academic workforce.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future research should involve broader institutional participation to enhance representativeness and generalizability. Studies could include a wider range of institutions, such as private universities, polytechnics, community colleges, and foreign universities, to enable cross-institutional and cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, qualitative or mixed-methods approaches are recommended to provide deeper insights into academics' experiences and the factors that underlie their organizational commitment and career outcomes.

Future research should also consider alternative moderating variables that may be more relevant to academics than networking behaviour. The meaningfulness of work is a potential variable because prior research has found that it significantly influences organizational commitment among academics at public universities (Bui et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence may also be considered, as recent evidence demonstrates its significant relationship with teachers' organizational commitment (Li et al., 2024). These variables may provide alternative explanations of how organizational factors influence academics' commitment and warrant further investigation as potential boundary conditions in future research.

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- Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah branch, for providing the necessary resources and support throughout this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality of this paper.
- Funding Statement:** No Funding
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the Advanced International Journal of Business, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (AIJBES)
- Ethics Statement:** This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the UiTM Research Ethics Committee, approval number REC/10/2023(OT/MR/17). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Siti Zaharah Safin and Syahmi Harudin were responsible for the study's conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision. Siti Zaharah Safin handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Mursyda Mahshar and Hasmah Laili Jamlurus contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.
- Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** “The author(s) declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The following tool(s) were used: ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly, and Quillbot. The tool(s) were used for language editing, refining statement, grammar improvement and paraphrasing. AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct statistical analyses, and interpret research findings. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and verified by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.”
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