

# Psychosocial Safety Climate, Job Demands, and Work-Related Outcomes: A Study of Malaysian Research Universities

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**Abstract:** *The recent QS 2021 World University Rankings showed that all five Malaysian research universities have improve and ranked among the world's top 200. The improvement in the ranking is an indicator that Malaysian research universities are making continuous efforts in improving their research and academics. To achieve a better ranking, Malaysian research universities use key performance indicators for academicians. Academicians may feel burdened with the high expectations from the management. The present study intends to examine how psychosocial safety climate (PSC) influence academicians work-related attitudes such as work engagement and job satisfaction. The study also intends to examine if job demands mediate the relationship between PSC and work-related attitudes. The paper is the first study examining PSC and academicians's work-related attitudes in Malaysian research universities.*

**Keywords:** *Psychosocial Safety Climate; Job Satisfaction; Job Demands; Work Engagement; Research Universities, Malaysia*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian research universities (RUs) are working hard to improve their research and academics. The expectation is relatively higher for academicians who work in Malaysian RUs, if compared with academicians from other universities. Academicians performance reflects a university's performance, productivity as well as its quality of the university. The recent Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) 2021 World University Rankings showed that all five Malaysian research universities have improved and ranked among the world's top 200. Universiti Malaya ranked 59th place and followed by Universiti Putra Malaysia (132nd), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (141st), Universiti Sains Malaysia (142nd) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (187th). To achieve a better ranking, academicians from RUs are required to meet key performance indicator (KPI). The increased expectation of RUs academicians may create work stress and eventually could lead to psychological health problems. Hence the study intends to examine how psychosocial safety climate (PSC) -- a climate for psychological health and safety -- influence academicians work-related attitudes such as work engagement and job satisfaction. In addition, the study proposes that job demands mediate the relationship between PSC and work-related attitudes. The study is the first study of its kind to investigate PSC and work-related attitudes among academicians in Malaysian RUs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Relationships between Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) and Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction*

PSC is the root of enhancing employees' engagement and satisfaction claimed by Hall et al., (2013). Management should concentrate on applying PSC in the workplace to enhancing engagement and satisfaction. In other words, if university policymaker can support academicians with providing the policy with high PSC context in a university, academicians will strengthen their work engagement and job satisfaction with the university. Hence, given that PSC enables academicians to enhance their work-related outcomes, it also can reduce mental collapse among academicians by accumulate resources from time to time.

Typically, an organization in a high PSC context will have a clear policy regarding psychological health and safety, proper communication channels as well as active participation among employees in stress prevention. Their employees will feel that their needs, such as psychological health and safety are concern by their employer. This, in turn, will provide employees with some form of autonomy in developing new skills. In other words, a high PSC organization will support their employees to grow and develop. Hence, a high PSC may boost employees' engagement within the organization (Idris, Dollard & Tuckey, 2015). The possible reason is that a high PSC working environment will make employees feel safe to work in this organization and have some form of policy in the working environment which will eventually increase the employees' engagement with the organization as well. We, therefore, propose that in a high PSC working environment, academicians are more likely to perform well, as well as enhance their work-related outcomes. Besides that, employees will feel safe to work in an organization which is provided in the high PSC working environment (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). If the university can provide a high PSC working environment, academicians are more likely to feel engagement with the university.

Idris et al. (2015) believed that one of the methods to satisfy employees is providing psychosocial safety is in the workplace. Saba (2011) mentioned that employees who work in a healthier and positive climate environment, the employee will have higher job satisfaction. Thus, management needs to apply the necessary PSC in a university. In the high PSC working environment, academicians able to increase their productivity, as well as job satisfaction (Basak & Govender, 2015; Khalid, Irshad & Mahmood, 2012).

According to Karanika-Murray, Michaelides, and Wood (2017), employees are willing to put more effort and increase their positive work-related outcomes if they work in a safe environment. Also, the management who applies higher PSC in the workplace, employees are more likely to exhibit positive work-related outcomes. In other words, to increase engagement and satisfaction among academicians, a high PSC in their universities' policy at the workplace is preferable.

Dollard and Bakker (2010) supported this view and argued that if an organization lack PSC, it would cause poor job design and increase the degree of job demands. In turn, if an organization has a good PSC, it will support employees to have better work-related outcomes. In line with PSC's concern to provide a healthy working environment for employees, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: PSC has a positive impact on work engagement.

H2: PSC has a positive impact on job satisfaction.

### *2.2 Relationships between Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) and Job Demands*

In line with the Conservation of Resource theory, PSC will have a negative relationship with job demand. In consequence, management who apply high PSC in an organization, they will reduce the negative impact of job demands (Yulita, Idris & Dollard, 2014). As mentioned by a few researchers (Idris & Dollard, 2011; Bakker, 2009; Schaufeli et al., 2009), job demands will negatively affect the employees' health in the workplace. An organization that lacks PSC could lead to imperfect job design and continuous job demands.

Few studies were done by researchers (Dollard & Bakker 2010; Idris & Dollard, 2011) had mentioned that good PSC does not only support employees, it also can predictably lower the impact of job demands too. With the understanding, universities should practice and apply good PSC to support academicians. Despite the fact that academicians frequently facing higher job demands, as long as the university can provide a good working environment (such as high PSC working environment), academicians still have competent ability to deal with it. In the interest of universities that wish to break world university ranking records, RU's management has recommended new policies in their perspective universities as well as making it as a part of an academician's KPI. These policies lead to higher job demands and burdens to academicians. As stated in Loh, Idris, Dollard & Isahak's (2018) study, PSC is a variable which can lower the pressure of employees' psychological health as well as mental health. Loh et al., (2018) further explained that the organization provided low concern of PSC; employees will have the awareness to lose their potential resources if they are unable to manage the job demands.

High job demands will make it difficult for employees to deal with their negative influences (Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004). Thus, university management must affirm that PSC has a negative impact on job demands. In addition, management will execute the high PSC environment, to assure that academicians can work under pressure working environments. Therefore, in this study, assumes that PSC has a negative relationship with job demands. The hypothesis formulated based on this is as per below:

H3: There is a negative relationship between PSC and job demands.

### *2.3 Relationships between Job Demands and Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction*

Several studies have shown that job demands affect work-related outcomes. These negative work-related outcomes were due to high job demands. Job demands will have a negative relationship to work-related outcomes when academicians unable to meet the management's expectations. Currently, academicians work in RUs always needs to face a high workload, and their working hours became longer (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001). As known, academicians not only need to deal with their role as academicians, but they still need to confront the rapid development pressures in the education field as well. In another way, with the pressure, it will affect academicians to reduce their work engagement and job satisfaction. When employees are often unable to achieve the requirement set by the organization, they will start to lose their engagement with the organization (Alzyoud, Othman & Isa 2014; Agyemang & Ofei, 2013; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Thus, high job demands have a negative relationship with work engagement (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007) and job dissatisfaction (Karanika-Murray, Michaelides & Wood, 2017; Mustapha & Ghee, 2013). The present researcher believed that only engaged and satisfied' academician able to handle their job demands in RUs.

Academician is the person who experiences the level of job demands. Thus, job demands may have a negative impact on work engagement and satisfaction, if academicians are unable

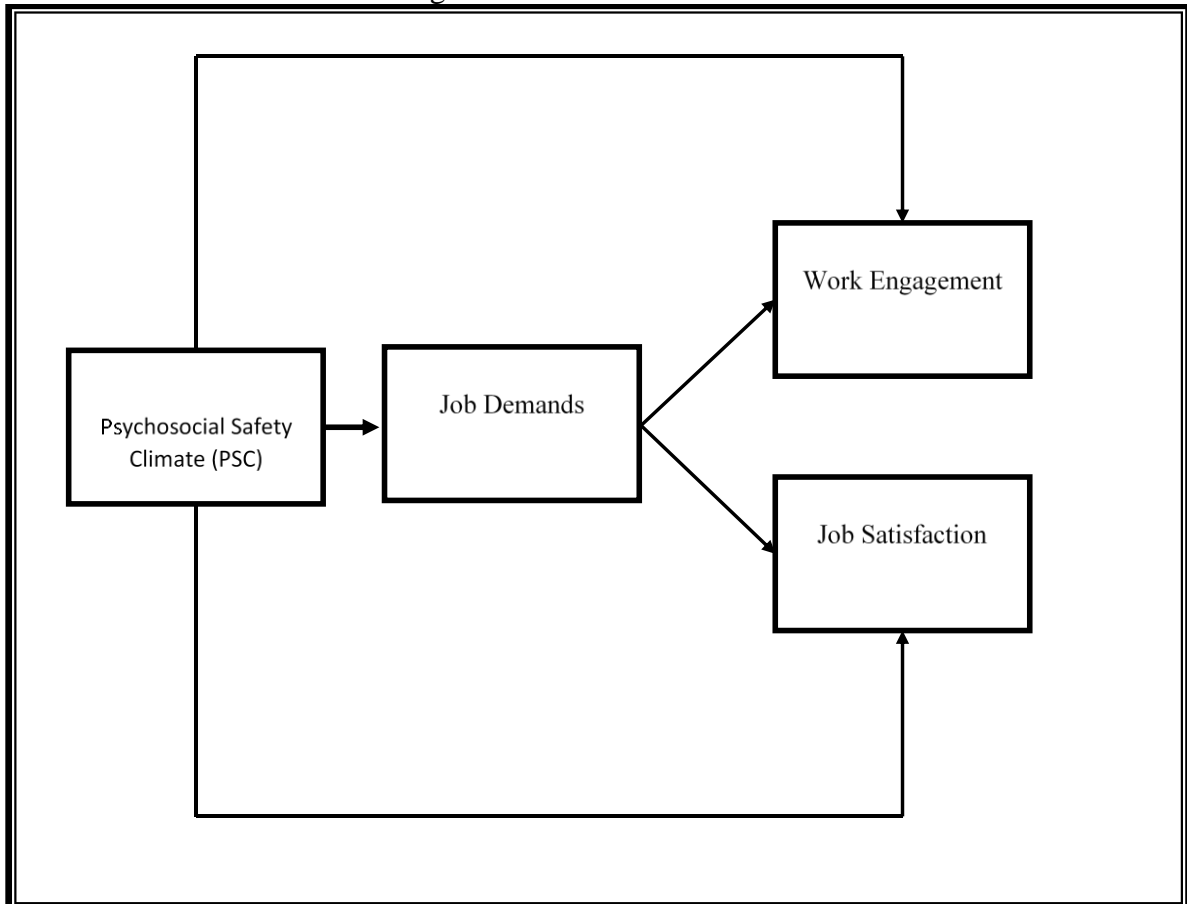
to undergo the working environment. Therefore, the researcher proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: There is a significant relationship between job demands and work engagement.

H5: There is a significant relationship between job demands and job satisfaction.

The proposed framework in this study as below:

Figure 1: Research Framework



### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study will include the academicians of five research universities in Malaysia, which is Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Academicians will answer the questionnaire through a google form. Researchers using this method is because of the current trend with increasing computer literacy (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Besides, purposive sampling technique will be used in this study. Hence, in this study must rely on researchers' judgment when selecting the sample based on the criteria (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Besides that, in this study, respondents must be a Malaysian, full-time academicians, working for more than one year.

#### 4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Based on the discussion at the literature review, PSC is a policy which is a procedure to protect academicians in the universities for their psychological health and safety. As long as academicians have safety in their workplace, it will enhance their engagement and satisfaction (Hall, Dollard & Coward, 2010; Hall, Dollard, Winefield, Dormann, & Bakker, 2013). It can nurture the engagement and satisfaction among academicians. Previously studied had shown that PSC had the influences and the positive relationship in Western countries (Idris, Dollard & Winefield, 2011), and less studied in the Eastern countries. Therefore, this study will examine the relationship between PSC and work-related outcomes. Researchers believe that there is a positive predicts between PSC and work engagement and job satisfaction.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

As conclusion, this study can be a guideline for universities to realize the needs of the academicians. Hence, PSC is coherent with this framework. This research provides the knowledge of PSC on how to improve the academicians' performance and productivity. This is to enhance the contribution of the management and policymakers while managing their employees with policy.

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