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# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS, JOB CRAFTING AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC STAFF

TAN CHI HAU



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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2020



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between personality traits, job crafting and work engagement among private university academic staff. The study used correlational design. Five-factor model by Costa and McCrae and revised job demands-resources model by Schaufeli and Bakker were used in this study. In examining the relationships among the variables, job crafting was selected as a mediating variable in this study. A sample of 284 respondents was randomly selected from 1,712 academic staff from two private universities in Perak. To collect qualitative data, an interview session was conducted with seven participants which were selected purposefully. Instruments used in this study consisted of mini international personality item pool, job crafting scale and Utrecht work engagement scales. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to collect qualitative data. Two experts have validated the instruments and the reliabilities of the instruments based on Cronbach Alpha coefficients were  $\alpha = 0.81, 0.88$ , and  $0.88$ , respectively. The quantitative results showed that agreeableness ( $\beta=0.393, p<0.05$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta=0.153, p<0.05$ ), openness to experience ( $\beta=0.129, p<0.05$ ) and extraversion ( $\beta=0.308, p<0.05$ ) have a significant positive effects on the respondents' work engagement while the presence of agreeableness ( $\beta=0.257, p<0.05$ ), openness to experience ( $\beta=0.195, p<0.05$ ) and extraversion ( $\beta=0.349, p<0.05$ ) promotes the respondents' job crafting behaviors. In addition, job crafting is also found to mediate between personality traits and work engagement. Qualitative data from the interview showed that three main themes – personality, job crafting and work engagement with 11 categories emerged from the semi-structured interview questions. In conclusion, the main finding showed that job crafting was a significant mediator to personality traits and work engagement. The dominant personality traits which affected the work engagement were agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness. This study implicates that job crafting should be nurtured by academicians in private universities in order to enhance the quality of their work engagement.





## HUBUNGAN ANTARA PERSONALITI, PENGUKIRAN KERJA DAN PENGLIBATAN KERJA DALAM KALANGAN STAF AKADEMIK UNIVERSITI SWASTA

### ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan hubungan antara personaliti, pengukiran kerja dan penglibatan kerja dalam kalangan staf akademik universiti swasta. Kaedah korelasi digunakan dalam kajian ini. Model lima-faktor daripada Costa dan McCrae dan model kerja permintaan-sumber daripada Schaufeli dan Bakker telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Dalam menguji hubungan antara pemboleh ubah, pengukiran kerja telah dipilih sebagai pemboleh ubah pengantara dalam kajian ini. Sebanyak 284 responden daripada 1,712 staf akademik dari dua buah universiti swasta di Perak telah dipilih secara rawak. Untuk mengutip data kualitatif, sesi temu bual telah dijalankan dengan tujuh peserta yang telah dipilih secara bertujuan. Intrumen dalam kajian ini terdiri daripada *mini international personality item pool*, skala pengukiran kerja dan skala penglibatan kerja *Utrecht*. Protokol temu bual separuh berstruktur telah dibangunkan untuk mengutip data kualitatif. Dua pakar telah dilantik untuk pengesahan intrumen dan kebolehpercayaan intrumen berdasarkan koefisien *Cronbach Alpha* adalah  $\alpha = 0.81$ ,  $0.88$ , dan  $0.88$  masing-masing. Dapatan kuantitatif menunjukkan faktor persetujuan ( $\beta=0.393$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), ketelitian ( $\beta=0.153$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), keterbukaan untuk pengalaman ( $\beta=0.129$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), dan ekstroversi ( $\beta=0.308$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) mempunyai kesan positif yang signifikan terhadap penglibatan kerja responden; manakala kehadiran persetujuan ( $\beta=0.257$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), keterbukaan untuk pengalaman ( $\beta=0.195$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) dan ekstroversi ( $\beta=0.349$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) menggalakkan tingkah laku pengukiran kerja responden. Selain itu, pengukiran kerja juga merupakan pemboleh ubah pengantara di antara personaliti dan penglibatan kerja. Data kualitatif daripada sesi temu bual mendapati tiga tema utama - personaliti, pengukiran kerja dan penglibatan kerja dengan 11 kategori muncul daripada sesi temu bual separuh berstruktur. Kesimpulannya, dapatan utama kajian menunjukkan pengukiran kerja merupakan pengantara di antara personaliti dan penglibatan kerja. Personaliti dominan yang mempengaruhi penglibatan kerja adalah persetujuan, ekstroversi dan ketelitian. Implikasi kajian mencadangkan agar staf akademik daripada universiti swasta perlu mengamalkan pengukiran kerja untuk meningkatkan kualiti penglibatan kerja mereka.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Agreeableness
Ab	Absorption
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
C	Conscientiousness
CB-SEM	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling
CI	Confident Intervals
CR	Composite Reliability
D	Dedication
DHJD	Decreasing Hinderling Job Demands
E	Extraversion
ERI	Effort Reward Imbalance
HCMs	Hierarchical Components Models
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
ICJD	Increasing Challenging Job Demands
IPIP	International Personality Item Pool
ISJ	Increasing Social Job Resources
ISJR	Increasing Structural Job Resources
JC	Job Crafting
JCS	Job Crafting Scale





JD-C	Job Demands-Control
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
LISREL	Linear Structural Relations
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
Mini-IPIP	Mini International Personality Item Pool
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MYREN	Malaysian Research and Education Network
N	Neuroticism
NEO-PI-R	Revised NEO Personality Inventory
O	Openness to Experience
PF	Personality Factors
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling
R	Respondent
RQ	Research Question
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SmartPLS	Smart Partial Least Squares
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
THE	Times Higher Education
UTAR	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
UTP	Universiti Teknologi Petronas
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
V	Vigor
VAF	Variance Account For





VIF Variance Inflation Factor

WE Work Engagement





## APPENDIX LIST

- A Sample Size Table
- B Questionnaire
- C *Pengesahan Pelajar Untuk Membuat Penyelidikan*
- D Consent Form
- E PLS-SEM Experts Reviews
- F *Surat Pelantikan Pakar Penilai Kesahan Instrumen*
- G *Surat Pelantikan Pakar Penilai Kesahan Soalan Temu Bual*
- H Interview Transcript Sample
- I Respondents Descriptive Statistics and PLS-SEM Results





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



Education is instrumental to an individual's success. Education enables a person to acquire the necessary skills that will prepare them for every mental, social and physical life aspect. These skills are communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, adaptive thinking and soft skills (Zoller, 2015; Sung, Chang & Liu, 2016). Moreover, these skills are useful when one is entering the working field. Social opulence, political stability and economic wealth are all made feasible through education and contribution by a social member such as academicians (Wan, Morshidi & Dzulkifli, 2015; Arenawati Sehat & Shahren, 2018). The Malaysian government envisages becoming an excellent education hub, showcased by the government's attention on higher education sector in the endeavor to produce quality human capital (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017).







Considering the importance of academic staff as the frontline of higher education sector who are responsible in ensuring education and maintaining physical and mental health among students (Mushemeza, 2016). Besides, academic staff are also responsible to mold the students into knowledgeable citizens and workers, transitioning themselves into the shoes of mentor, counsellor, guider and role model for the students (Cornelius, Wood & Lai, 2016; Hamilton, Stevens & Girdler, 2016). In order to perform their best, academic staff need to be engaged passionately with their work and responsibilities (Rosman, Azlah, Anwar & Suaibah, 2013). Work engagement is beneficial for both employees and organizations. Better job performance (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Kim, Han & Park, 2019), positive employee experience (Rothbard & Patil, 2012), positive physiological effects (Knight, Patterson & Dawson, 2017) and better employees' well-being (Shuck & Reio Jr, 2014) are results from enhanced work engagement.



Sekhar, Patwardhan and Vyas (2018) also stated that engaged people are more sensitive to opportunities at work. Besides, they are more outgoing and helpful to others and more confident in task completion. For instance, Bakker and Bal (2010) showed that engaged teachers received higher ratings from their supervisors on in-role performance, indicating that engaged employees perform well and are willing to go the extra mile. Therefore, it is crucial that academic staff are placed into the limelight by analyzing their work engagement.





In this study, work engagement among academic staff are theorized to be influenced by the Big Five personality traits and job crafting. Work engagement is significantly linked to Big Five personality traits (Liao, Yang, Wang, Drown & Shi, 2013; Woods & Sofat, 2013; Mróz & Kaleta, 2016). The Big Five personality refers to extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience. A personality is a distinguishing employee characteristic and quality (Schultz & Schultz, 2016). Adaptive capacity, limitation and personal strength and weakness among academic staff can be observed through personality assessment. This information can later be used by top management in an organization to evaluate candidates for employment or promotion that would boost engagement (Fisher, Cunningham, Kerr & Allscheid, 2017).



personality and engagement, as it will influence employees' workplace engagement (Bakker, Rodriguez-Munoz & Vergel, 2016; De Beer, Tims & Bakker, 2016). Job crafting refers to increasing structural job resources, decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources and increasing challenging job demands. Digital world, economic changes and technological advances in the field of education force organizations and their people to constantly adapt (Zhu, Sun & Riezebos, 2016; Van Wingerden, Bakker & Derks, 2017). For instance, in higher educational landscape, academic staff can no longer just use their whiteboard and power point slides but have to utilize educational technology such as learning software, online learning and mobile learning as well. For this reason, academic staff's jobs are directly affected by forces from outside the organizations. As a result, they may need to change their task size and processes to fit between recent movement of education trend and personal situation.





This proactive self-initiated job change is called job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Lee & Lee, 2018). Yet, these proactive changes depend on the types of employee's personality. Allowing one's possibility to craft their job to boost work engagement (Zanfirescu & Butucescu, 2016). Hence, this research sets to examine the effects of personality towards work engagement in the education industry with the presence of job crafting as a mediator in the relationship.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

Globalization and technology have completely transformed sectors such as finance, services and telecommunications and the higher education sector will likely face the same transformation or as a matter of fact is already experiencing disruption from new models such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Ganapathy, 2016). Competition among universities is intensifying internationally for students, for staff and for resources. The birth of Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 consolidates the Ministry's overriding aspiration to create a higher education system that ranks among the world's leading education systems and that enables Malaysia to compete in the global economy (Nor Fathimah, Siti Zuraidah & Rozinah, 2016; Amanina & Saifullizam, 2017).

As stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, a nation's socio-cultural and economic success depends on the quick and significant improvement of its education system. There are two types of post-secondary education in Malaysia, namely the public higher education institutions (HEIs) and private HEIs. The increasing



demand for higher education validates the existence of private HEIs in the quest to ensure participation of higher education for all.

Over the last decades, Malaysia's private higher education system has grown rapidly and steadily. Table 1.1 shows that by 2017, there are 495 private HEIs. As of 31 of July 2017, there were 34,750 academic staff in 495 private HEIs, of which 53 are of university status, 34 of university college status, 10 of university status (branch campus of foreign university) and 398 of college status in Malaysia (*Bahagian Pendaftaran & Piawaian*, 2017).

Table 1.1

*The Statistic of Private HEIs by the States in Malaysia*

State	University Status	University College Status	University Status (Branch Campus of Foreign University)	College Status	Total
Perlis	-	1	-	2	3
Kedah	2	1	-	7	10
Penang	1	3	-	28	32
Perak	4	1	-	22	27
Selangor	22	8	3	104	137
KL	13	6	1	90	110
Putrajaya	1	-	1	-	2
Kelantan	-	2	-	11	13
Terengganu	1	2	-	10	13
Pahang	2	2	-	12	16
N. Sembilan	3	2	-	19	24
Melaka	1	2	-	16	19
Johor	2	2	3	25	32
Sabah	-	2	-	24	26
Sarawak	1	1	2	27	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>495</b>

Source: *Bahagian Pendaftaran & Piawaian* (2017)

Students' enrolment has also increased significantly over the past ten years, together with the larger global recognition in various aspects such as publications, research findings, patents and institutional quality (Jamil, Sarker & Abdullah, 2012). The number of international students increased from 33,903 students in year 2005 to 87,002 students in year 2015 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017). As shown in Table 1.2, there is a sharp increase in the number of students' enrolment in private HEIs from 258,825 students in 2005 to 562,340 students in 2015 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017).

Table 1.2

*Number of Students' Enrolment according to Level of Studies in Private HEIs in 2005 and 2015*

Level of Studies	2005	2015	Growth Rate (%)
Certificate	50,672	59,601	17.62
Diploma	101,311	210,574	107.85
Bachelor	101,395	266,622	162.95
Master	4,849	20,958	332.21
PhD	5,98	4,585	666.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>258,825</b>	<b>562,340</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2017)

In fact, two private higher education institutions (HEIs) namely Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) and Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) were recently listed in top nine Malaysia universities announced by the Times Higher Education (THE) World University ranking 2018 (THE, 2017). The achievement is the result, efforts and innovation of the academic community, contribution of the private sector and large investments as well as planning by the Malaysia government, such as the



Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025. This blueprint aims to improve access to education, develop students' holistic knowledge and transform the teaching skill in order to achieve effective and sustainable education system in Malaysia.

Many researches confirmed that private HEIs were not only expected to fulfil the primary role such as building knowledge-based society but also to build human capital that will drive Malaysia towards high-income developed nation status (Kok, Cheah & Ang, 2011; Chang et al., 2015; Donlagić & Fazlić, 2015). The roles and importance of private HEIs were discussed in the next section. Towards this goal, good personality, engaged and highly motivated academic staff play an important role to ensure sustainable development of private education (Cebrián, Grace & Humphris, 2015; Tan, Mansi & Furnham, 2018). In other words, the robustness of private HEIs development very much depends on the institution's human resource. Academic staff is an essential element for every educational institution especially among private HEIs in the competitive market. Higher engagement among the academic staff results in impressive performance that will bring about healthier and more positive climate in the institute (Fauziah & Kamaruzaman, 2009).

Often, academic staff possess personality traits that can distinguish his or her behavior from each other. In other words, different academic staff portrayed different types of internal characteristics. These traits will make them either more or less suited with the changes of the learning or teaching environment. The Big Five personality traits are one of the best personality measurement tool and most highly regarded trait theories of personality (Digman, 1990; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997; Harari, Jain & Joseph, 2014). This theory includes five personality dimensions which are extraversion,





conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience (Ono, Sachau, Deal, Englert & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to understand how important the effect of personality traits is in contributing to a person's engagement towards his or her work.

"Learn to teach" approach has always been adopted by effective academic staff in order to improve the art and quality of teaching (Chia & Abdul Rahim, 2014). In this sense, job crafting concept represents the process of matching suitable "learning" approach with one's skill and interest. Oldham and Hackman (2010) describe the concept as enabling the employees to customize their task and job scope according to specific situation or customer. In this study context, academic staff customize their teaching method according to students learning style. The concept was first introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), before being further enhanced to enable the employees to customize their job with their respective skill and interest (Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2013). Sakuraya et al. (2017) further accentuate the concept as a way to nurture higher engagement among dissatisfied employees.

Subsequently, satisfied employees tend to prioritize their work which illustrates their engagement (Bakker, 2011). The engagement is introduced and hypothesized by Kahn as a connection between the employees and their work inclusive of cognitive, emotion and physical elements (Kahn, 1990). Still, definition offered by Bakker (2011) has been widely used by past literature, whereby they assert work engagement as a positive working condition surrounded by dedication, absorption and vigor.





In a nutshell, higher education is an important service sector and has received much attention in recent years (Kruss, McGrath, Petersen & Gastrow, 2015). Therefore, this study intends to examine the effect of Big Five personality traits on work engagement through job crafting as a mediator in private higher education industry in Malaysia. As a result, this study could provide meaningful insight and information to the university's staffing process as well as providing training and development to improve work engagement among the academic staff in private higher education industry.

### 1.2.1 The Roles and Importance of Private Higher Education Institutions



The main role and importance of the private higher education in Malaysia is to offer more opportunities in higher education (Arokiasamy & Ong, 2008; Yusuf, 2014). It is due to the limited intakes into the public higher education institutions and this negatively affects the community. The limitation reduces the opportunities of the students to pursue their studies in higher education. The rapid development of the country has caused the existence of private higher education institutions in Malaysia. Referring to Table 1.1, there are 495 private HEIs in 2015. This shows that the number of private HEIs surpasses the number of public HEIs in this country. Therefore, the people do not have to worry about the opportunity to pursue their studies in higher education because private HEIs can offer the placement for the people to obtain higher education.







The next role and importance of private HEIs is to reduce the family and nation expenses (Mugabi, 2012). The saving on family expenses can be realized in terms of the reduced cost to get a good quality education within Malaysia (Tang, 2012). Also, the nation expenses can be reduced because the government can lessen the number of scholarships for studying abroad. Referring to Table 1.2, the increase in the intakes of international students into the Malaysian higher education institutions also generates the national income (Lim, Yap & Lee, 2011).

In addition, private HEIs play a role to make Malaysia as the center of academic excellence in the Asian region (Suleiman, Hanafi & Taslikhan, 2017). The private education sector acts as the catalyst for the industrial transformation and as the partner in the government's efforts to improve the quality and create a brand for international higher education in Malaysia and at the same time makes Malaysia as the excellent education hub in the Asian region.

Private HEIs is also important when their degrees are recognized worldwide (Kok et al., 2011; Naidu & Derani, 2016). The strong financial position enables the private HEIs to provide the best world class facilities such as UTP, UTAR and Monash University. At the same time, the private HEIs can offer valuable and good quality fields of study such as engineering, accountancy and business management. Through this, the students have the opportunity to have international networks to be successful at the international level.





In conclusion, the roles and importance of private HEIs in Malaysia cannot be denied because an effective education system compatible with the international standard is needed to drive the country through the world rapid development. For that, private HEIs must be given the opportunities to grow and bring benefits to the country with their special roles.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

As noted in the earlier section, considering academic staff as the front liner in supporting the roles of private HEIs, therefore, denotes a significant fact in studying academic staff of private HEIs, in this study, to examine their personality traits, job crafting behavior and work engagement level. However, four out of ten employees reportedly experience disengagement with their work around the world, leading to poor organizational commitment, high turnover and low production by nearly half of the work forces (Gallup Engagement Survey, 2016). In Malaysia, only 11 percent out of about 15 million employees are engaged with their work, while a whopping 81 percent reportedly feel not engaged and eight percent are actively disengaged (Gallup Engagement Survey, 2016). However, the disengaged workers will still collect their wages while complaining or considering for their next job application and signaling low likeliness of staying in the company.

The consequences are most obvious in industries that greatly rely on human capital such as services industry, specifically in education industry. In education industry, high yearly turnover rate is a sign of disengaged workers and incurs high cost





that greatly impacts the companies (Md. Mizanur & Md. Solaiman, 2012). Employee turnover cost can range from 25 percent to 200 percent (Branham, 2000) while Chamberlain (2017) stated that the average employee turnover cost is equivalent to 21 percent of their annual salary. Statistics from Ministry of Higher Education (2017) showed that the total number of academic staff in private HEIs has declined from 36,185 (year 2014) to 34,750 (year 2015) despite the increasing number of private HEIs. A survey from Malaysian Employers Federation (2012) also stated that the turnover rates specifically for academic staff from private higher institutions for the period from July 2010 till June 2011 was 30 percent. This clearly shows that turnover among private HEIs academicians is rather high comparing to other HEIs category (Ainer, Subramaniam & Arokiasamy, 2018) in the past 10 years. More strikingly, according to the research by Norlida, Munirah, Amiruddin, Ayuffeirah and Erratul Shella (2014), job mobility among private university academic staff in Malaysia has become an issue for the institution as most institutions and management do not understand employee work engagement (Jakopec et al., 2015). As a result, academic staff disengagement has led to poor student's performance. It has also encouraged negative attitudes among students, low teaching quality and substandard teaching performance, which in entirety, affects the university culture adversely (Yadav, 2016; Blazar & Kraft, 2017).

Academically, past studies have proven that job crafting can indeed improve employee work engagement. Writers such as Bakker, Tims and Derks (2012) opined that employees tend to showcase excellent job performance in a resourceful environment that offers their employees sufficient job resources to facilitate their work engagement, including feedback and social support. However, employees may also





organize for their own job challenges (e.g., reducing high workload) and job resources (e.g., trying to develop capabilities at work) as managers are not always available for providing feedback or social support. In other words, there are oftentimes too busy. Under such conditions, it may be particularly important for employees to show proactive internal characteristic and take self-initiative actions in optimize their work environment that fit personal ability and situation (dimension of job crafting) (Ng & Tay, 2010; Bakker et al., 2012).

Often, different academic staff portrays different types of internal characteristics. Thus, Big Five Personality Traits Model provides a foundation to understand human personality and characteristic towards job crafting and work engagement (Komarraju, Karau, Schmeck & Avdic, 2011). However, insufficient literature still exists as to whether Big Five personality traits are related to job crafting and work engagement, in particularly to the Malaysian private HEIs, seeing its importance. Most previous studies were mainly focused on traits such as emotional intelligence, proactive personality, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-regulation as the antecedents in job crafting (Tims & Bakker, 2010) and work engagement (Nayyar, Rana, Farheen, Ghazala & Mohammad Taqi, 2013). Therefore, there is a practical and theoretical need to further amplify past researches by investigating the factors.

Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that many of the past studies on job crafting was not quantitative in nature, rather it was studied as either theoretical (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani & Slowik, 2007) or qualitative in nature (Lyons, 2008; Berg, Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2010; Sturges, 2012), with a few exceptions (Ghitulescu, 2006; Leana, Appelbaum & Shevchuk,





2009). Nevertheless, these theoretical and qualitative studies contributed significantly in advancing the job crafting research literature. Furthermore, job crafting has been practiced locally and internationally in various groups of occupation including school teacher, doctors, hospital nurses, dentists, blue-collar and white collar workers (e.g.: engineer, human resource executive and administrative staff) and private home-care professionals (Janse van Rensburg, Boonzaier & Boonzaier, 2013; Marta & Bakker, 2016; Bell & Njoli, 2016). Yet, few job crafting has been carried out among private university academic staff in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the direct relationship between personality traits and work engagement might not provide a complete picture of the factors which enhanced work engagement. In a recent study, Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne and Zacher (2017) estimated that there were positive correlations between Big Five personality traits dimension and job crafting behaviors. There is also evidence that personality may be related to work engagement (Janssens, De Zutter, Geens, Vogt & Braeckman, 2019). In addition, Zecca et al. (2015) also mentioned that more future research should take into account the role of mediator process in between personality traits and work engagement. The existing evidence inspires the inquiry on the inclusion of job crafting in this study as a mediator to examine the personality types that are most likely to craft the academics job in order to ensure continuous work engagement. Hence, this study serves to be an interesting one where it determines to narrow the literature gap by diving into the analysis of the three main constructs from a developing nation's point of view, zeroing the attention to Malaysian private HEIs.





## 1.4 Theoretical Framework

The Big Five Personality Traits Model or the Five-factor Model and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model are underpinned this present study. The Five-factor Model was proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992). The Five-factor Model includes five dimensions that provide useful information to organization about individual differences (Kumar & Bakhshi, 2010). It is operationalized through variables like extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience. The meaning of the factors can best be seen by examining trait adjectives that describe individuals who score high and low on each (Costa & McCrae, 1992) as following:

- **Extraversion** is explained as: people who have high extraversion are easily express positive emotions such as happiness, cheerfulness and assertiveness.

Extraversion also characterized by being sociable, hence, extraverts has high tendency in making more friends. On this scale, high scorer represents by sociable and fun-loving while low scorer represents by reserved and quiet.

- **Conscientiousness** is explained as: people who are dependable, persistent and responsible. Conscientiousness also characterized being task and result oriented. They pay more attention on specific goal and carefully plan to give result and performance at work. On this scale, high scorer represents by ambitions and reliable while low scorer represents by aimless and lazy.





- **Agreeableness** is explained as: people who pro-social as well as tender minded, good natured and caring. Agreeableness also characterized being related to interpersonal interactions. However, they are poor in decision making due to easily influenced by others. On this scale, high scorer represents by soft-hearted and helpful while low scorer represents by cynical and vengeful.
- **Openness to experience** is explained as: people who can think out-of- the box, good in imaginative and possess high flexibility. Further to this, openness to experience also characterized being seeking improvement which beneficial career achievement. On this scale, high scorer represents by broad interests and curious while low scorer represents by conventional and down-to-earth.
- **Neuroticism** is explained as: people who tend to easily experience more negative affect and negative emotions such as worry, anger and embarrassment. People who high in neuroticism tend to have high job demands such as poor co-workers relationship and low self-esteem. On this scale, high scorers represent by worrying and nervous while low scorer represent by calm and secure.

The summary of Big Five traits factors and illustrative scale were showed in the Table 1.3.



Table 1.3

*The Big Five Traits Factors and Illustrative Scale*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Trait scales</b>	<b>Characteristics of the high scorer</b>	<b>Characteristics of the low scorer</b>
Extraversion	“Assesses quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction and activity level.”	Sociable, talkative, fun-loving	Reserved, quiet, aloof
Conscientiousness	“Assesses the individual’s degree of organization, persistence and motivation in goal-directed behavior.”	Hardworking, ambitions, reliable	Lazy, aimless, unreliable
Agreeableness	“Assesses the quality of one’s interpersonal orientation along a continuum from compassion to antagonism in feelings and thoughts.”	Soft-hearted, helpful, forgiving	Cynical, uncooperative, vengeful
Neuroticism	“Assesses adjustment versus emotional instability. Identifies individuals prone to psychological distress and unrealistic ideas.”	Worrying, nervous, insecure	Relaxed, calm, secure
Openness to experience	“Assesses proactive seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake; toleration for and exploration of the unfamiliar.”	Curious, broad interests, creative	Conventional, down-to-earth, inartistic

Source: Costa &amp; McCrae (1992a)





Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model was developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) and later further improved by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) to study individual employee as shown in Figure 1.1. Job demands refers to work overload and job insecurity that may lead to employee frustration and health problems (the health impairment process) while job resources refers to supervisory coaching and social support that may lead to work engagement (the motivational process) (Bakker, 2011). In other words, health problems and depletion of energy are caused by employee's exhaustion due to high job demand such as work overloaded; in contrast, high work engagement is foster by job resources such as supportive team members (Hu, Schaufeli & Taris, 2016). By using JD-R model, Tims, Bakker and Derks (2012) framed job crafting in the context of JD-R model then proposed an alternative approach of job crafting. Accordingly, job crafting is defined as modifications an employee may do to adjust the job demands and job resources with their certain capabilities and wants. Tims et al. (2012) have shown that job crafting could be divided mainly into four dimensions namely increasing structural job resources, decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources and increasing challenging job demands.

Moreover, work engagement was developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002). Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption". This definition has used JD-R model to "explain" engagement (Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2017). JD-R model noted that job resources was positively associated with work engagement.



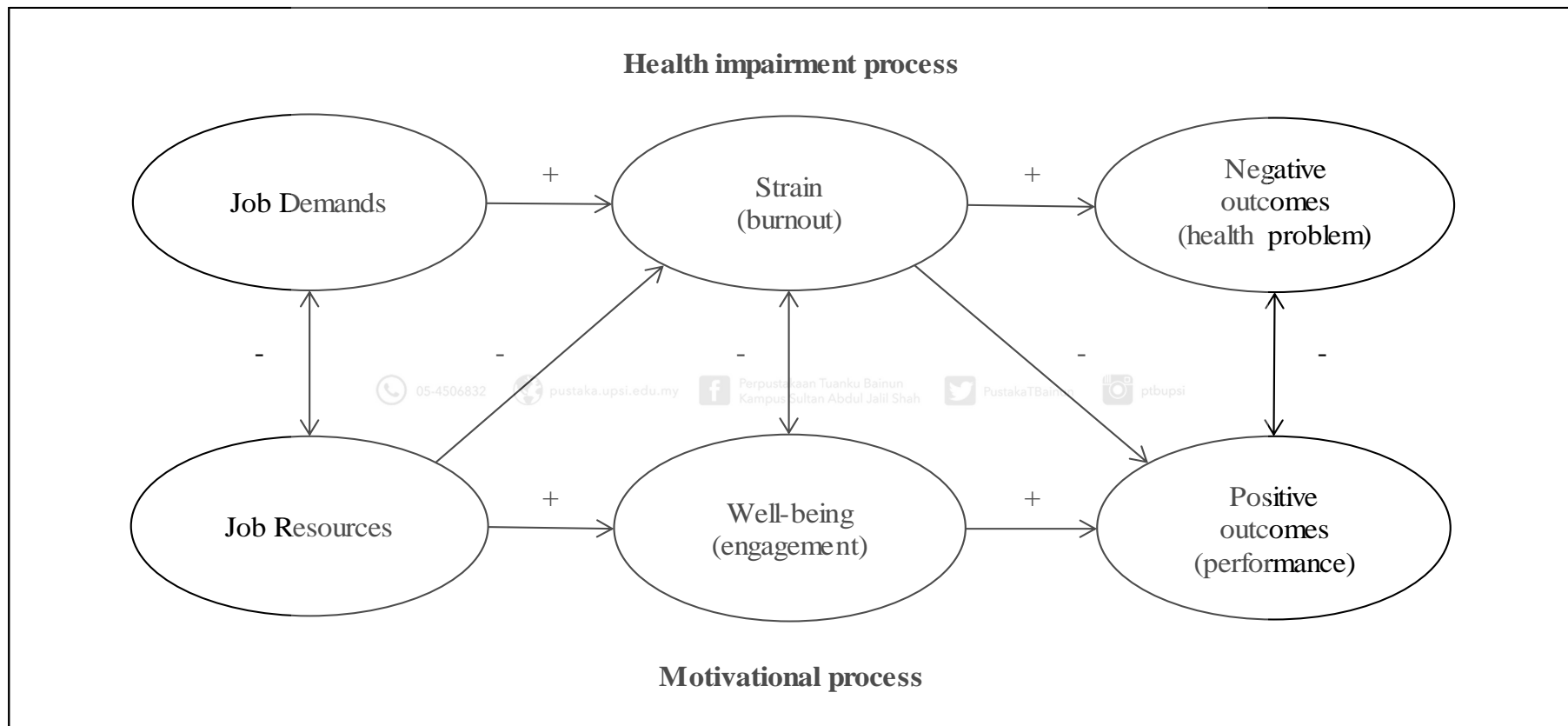


Figure 1.1. The Theoretical Framework of the Revised JD-R Model. Source from Schaufeli & Bakker (2004)



Thus, in studying the likely relation between Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement, an individual's personality is to say can influence that individual to craft his or her work, which, in turn, may affect the degree of work engagement in the workplace. Previous studies (Ongore, 2014; Mróz & Kaleta, 2016; Ansari & Talan, 2017) found some relations between Big Five personality traits and work engagement, in that employee with high extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience and low neuroticism is positively related to work engagement. Similarly, related studies (Bakker, 2015; Marta & Bakker, 2016) have reported job crafting mediates the relationship between personality and work engagement.



The conceptual framework was developed based on the Five-factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the Revised JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), as well as empirical studies. The Five-factor Model is used to explain the Big Five personality traits while the Revised JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) is used to examine the relationship between job crafting and work engagement in the context of Malaysia private HEIs.

This study proposes a conceptual framework on the relationship between an exogenous (independent) construct and an endogenous (dependent) construct with a mediator among private universities' academic staff. The exogenous construct is the Big Five personality traits which include five basic dimensions, namely extraversion,





conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience. Mediator construct is job crafting which includes four dimensions, namely increasing structural job resources; decreasing hindering job demands; increasing social job resources and increasing challenging job demands, while endogenous construct is work engagement which includes three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. However, in this study, job crafting and work engagement were served as second/ higher order constructs. All four job crafting dimensions and three work engagement dimensions, rather than being separate, are all integral parts of a person's job crafting and work engagement to makes the framework more theoretically meaningful (Becker, Klein & Wetzels, 2012; Ciavolino & Nitti, 2013; Cheah et al., 2018).

Although the dimensions of job crafting were often tested independently in the literature, however, recent past studies (Tims, Derks & Bakker, 2016; Bell & Njoli, 2016; Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017) has also examine the overall job crafting as this overall conceptualization was consistent with the idea that job crafting represent the instrument of related proactive behavior that enhanced person-environment fit (Rudolph et al., 2017). As for work engagement, it is a common approach to study the aggregate score – overall work engagement (Halbesleben, Harvey & Bolino, 2009). This is because the three dimensions are highly intercorrelated with inter-subscales correlations more than 0.50 (Borst, Kruijen, & Lako, 2017).

Based on the literature review, the Big Five personality traits affect work engagement. The five dimensions of Big Five personality traits are hypothesized to affect work engagement. For example, extraversion and conscientiousness personality traits were proven to be positively related to work engagement (Handa & Gulati, 2014).





Therefore, right personality drive academic staff in achieving high knowledge dissemination and better teaching performance (Barkhuizen, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2014). It has also encouraged the positive attitude of students, which entirely promotes better university culture (Silman, 2014).

Further to this, although previous references were limited, related literature revealed that job crafting mediates the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and work engagement. Proactive personality promotes individuals to work differently by reframing the objective of the job (Tausky, 1995) so that it can lead to an individual feeling motivated, energized and having a sense of belonging with their work (Mäkikangas, 2018). Active job crafters experience high energies in physical activities, low levels in burnout and this positively affects employee initiative, job effectiveness, employee proactivity, employee engagement and lower absenteeism in the organization (Ghitulescu, 2006; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012; Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Therefore, researcher choose to use job crafting as a mediator between Big Five personality traits and work engagement. The proposed conceptual framework for this present study is presented in Figure 1.2.



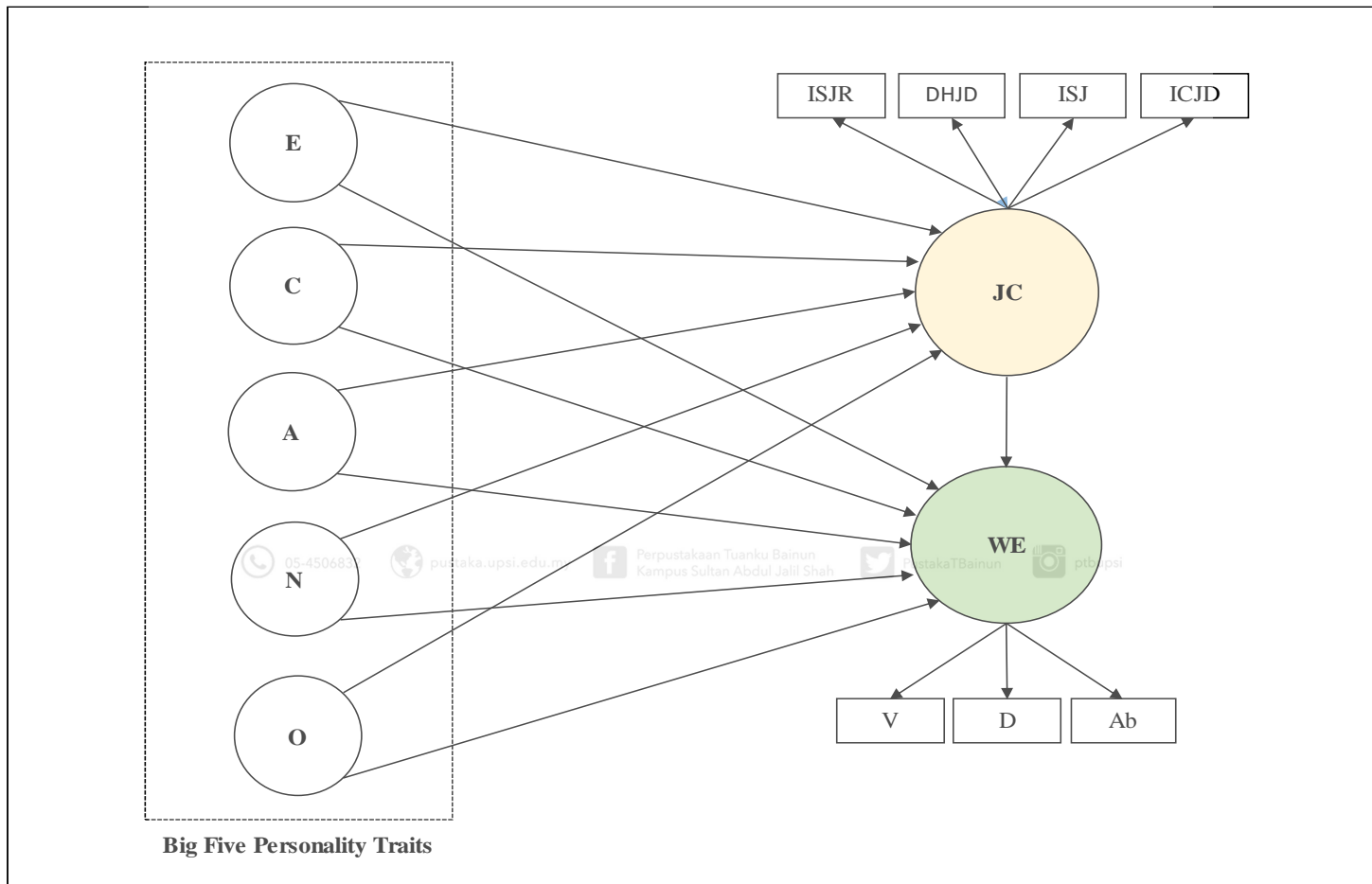


Figure 1.2. Conceptual Framework

Note, N = Neuroticism; O = Openness to experience; C = Conscientiousness; A = Agreeableness; E = Extraversion; ISJR = Increasing Structural Job Resources; DHJD = Decreasing Hinderling Job Demands; ISJ = Increasing Social Job Resources; ICJD = Increasing Challenging Job Demands; V = Vigor; D = Dedication; Ab = Absorption; JC = Job Crafting; WE = Work Engagement



## 1.6 Research Objectives

The general objective of this research is:

To examine the effects of Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism & openness to experience) on work engagement with job crafting as a mediator among private university academic staff.

The specific objectives of this research are:

- i. To examine the effects of Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism & openness to experience) on work engagement.
- ii. To examine the effects of Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism & openness to experience) on job crafting.
- iii. To examine the effect of job crafting on work engagement.
- iv. To examine the mediating effect of job crafting in the relationship between Big Five personality traits and work engagement.
- v. To determine the practices of Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement from the perspective of private university academic staff.





## 1.7 Research Questions

This research will seek to answer the following questions:

Research question 1:

What are the effects of Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism & openness to experience) on work engagement?

Research question 2:

What are the effects of Big Five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism & openness to experience) on job crafting?

Research question 3:

What is the effect of job crafting on work engagement?

Research question 4:

To what extent job crafting mediates the relationship between Big Five personality traits and work engagement?

Research question 5:

What are the practices of Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement from the perspective of private university academic staff?







## 1.8 Hypothesis

Based on literature research, this research hypothesizes that:

H1: Big Five personality traits have significant effect on work engagement.

H1a: Extraversion has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H1b: Conscientiousness has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H1c: Agreeableness has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H1d: Neuroticism has a significant negative effect on work engagement.

H1e: Openness to experience has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H2: Big Five personality traits have significant effect on job crafting.

H2a: Extraversion has a significant positive effect on job crafting.

H2b: Conscientiousness has a significant positive effect on job crafting.

H2c: Agreeableness has a significant positive effect on job crafting.

H2d: Neuroticism has a significant negative effect on job crafting.

H2e: Openness to experience has a significant positive effect on job crafting.

H3: Job crafting has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H4: Job crafting significantly mediates the relationship between Big Five personality traits and work engagement.





## 1.9 Significance of the Study

The study findings will facilitate both the Malaysian government and private universities by providing insights and recommendations to further enhance the quality of private higher education in the country.

### 1.9.1 Contribution to Knowledge

As highlighted in problem statement, scarce past studies and insufficient empirical findings are the two problems in testing the relationship of Big Five personality traits and job crafting with work engagement among academic staff in Malaysian private universities. For example, most of the research studies found to support the proposition of job crafting affecting work engagement were mainly conducted in the west such as United State of America (Frederick & VanderWeele, 2020). With this study, it is believed to be able to provide some form of empirical data and contribute to prior theories by examining how job crafting will mediate the degree of each Big Five personality traits and work engagement in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study will be able to contribute to the knowledge of human resource development perspective such as hiring and selection processes.





### 1.9.2 Contribution to Government Policy

This study could provide government with effective findings to improve the reputation and quality of the private universities as well as to develop human resource in education sector. Rigorous tests on Big Five personality traits and job crafting will stimulate more staff engagement, eventually leading to better university performance and ranking. Such improvement will ultimately result in better quality assurance in various aspects including research, publication, teaching and reputation of the private universities.

Quality assurance and reputation are the required credentials to be listed in the top 200 World or Asian university ranking (Dobrota, Bulajic, Bornmann & Jeremic, 2016). Improved ranking will simultaneously improve the reputation of the respective universities. In addition, Malaysian private universities are also expected to attract more students and foreign students based on the numerous initiatives to enhance publication, research and teaching aspects. These initiatives and enhancements are hoped to produce quality and competitive graduates who will in turn contribute towards Malaysia's transformation from middle-income nation to sustainable high-income nation in the future.





### 1.9.3 Contribution to Private Universities Sector

The study findings could unveil the most influential dimensions of personality traits and job crafting that determine the level of work engagement. Ascertaining the dimensions will facilitate universities to focus on areas that would boost work engagement, such as implementation of appropriate practices and training to improve the work quality and performance. Simultaneously, turnover rate can be reduced as knowledgeable employees are retained in the institutions.

Besides, this study also could provide guidelines for private universities in recruitment and selection process in order to hire qualified academic staff who able to make significant contributions to education. Simultaneously, hiring cost can be reduced as better hiring processes and procedures are established in the institutions.

### 1.10 Scope of the Study

The study mainly examines the relationship between Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement in first and determine the practices of Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement from the perspective of private university academic staff in second. The scope of the study is explained in this section. Its acts as a guideline for discussion in the upcoming chapters.





- a. This study employed a mixed methods design (QUAN → qual) to examine the relationship between Big Five personality traits, job crafting and work engagement as well as the practices of the three main variables from the perspective of private university academic staff.
- b. This study used survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions as research tools to collect data from respondents. Self-administered and face to face interview approaches were carried out to gather the data.
- c. The unit of analysis for this study was the selected private universities in Malaysia, gathering responses from the academic staff of these universities.
- d. The theoretical framework constructed for this study was consisted with that of the Five-factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) for the Big Five personality traits and consistent with the revised Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) for job crafting and work engagement.

### 1.11 Delimitations of the Study

According to Creswell (2014), delimitations means the boundaries that researcher set for the study so that research scope will not become impossibly large to complete. In simple words, delimitations expressed “What researcher wants to work in?” The delimitations of this present study as following:





- a. The study is delimited to the full-time academic staff titled from lecturer to senior professor who worked in private university and having teaching experience for minimum three years.
- b. The study is delimited to private universities listed in the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Ranking 2017 Top 150. There are two private universities were listed in the ranking namely UTAR and UTP. The focused universities were located in Perak state.

### 1.12 Limitations of the Study

Despite the numerous efforts to ensure the comprehensiveness of this study, a few limitations should be noted. The first limitation is the study also faced a few problems of unavailable research information and literature reviews. The issue arose as most past studies mainly focused on western countries (Mróz & Kaleta, 2016; Frederick & VanderWeele, 2020) and showed lesser tendency to directly investigate the relationship between Big Five personality traits, job crating and work engagement. Still, these studies were adopted in this study and prompted the possibility of inadequate variables due to cultural differences.

In addition, the second limitation is the construct measurement instrument of Big Five personality traits. Short version of personality traits instrument namely Mini International Personality Item Pool (Mini-IPIP) was adopted in this present study. Although the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of Mini-IPIP was ranging from 0.70 to 0.82 but it may not be sufficiently accurate in assessing personality traits if to compare with





other more comprehensive personality traits instrument such as Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R).

Furthermore, our respondents comprised academic staff from selected universities that had agreed to participate in the survey such as UTAR and UTP. Both universities were selected based on THE Asia University Ranking 2017 Top 150. The participation has limited the results' generalizability to other groups, hence requires future study to test the applicability of the findings to other private universities. The applicability may be tested in terms of the relationship between job crafting and the Big Five personality traits.



### **Big Five Personality Traits**

Five-factor model suggests that there are five basic personality dimensions that can explain an individual's differences in behavior namely extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992). In this study, Big Five personality traits utilize dimensions of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience.





Extraversion refers to how outgoing, sociable and active a person is. Conscientiousness refers to how dependable, organized, self-disciplined and responsible one is. Agreeableness refers to how helpful, kind and cooperative one is. Neuroticism refers to how worry, fear, insecure, depressed mood and anger one is. Openness to experience refers to how intellectual, imaginative, curious and interested in abstract ideas one is.

### **Job Crafting**

Tims et al. (2012) defined job crafting as a “specific type of proactive work behavior that employees engage in to adjust their job to their needs, skills and preferences”. Tims et al. (2012) have shown that job crafting can derived into four different types of dimensions/ behaviors: (a) increasing structural job resources; (b) decreasing hindering job demands (c) increasing social job resources; and (d) increasing challenging job demands.

Increasing structural job resources discusses diversity in resources, the chance for expansion and autonomy. Decreasing hindering job demands where employees lessen the demands they take in at work when they realize the demands have become overwhelming. Increasing social job resources discusses social support, managerial training and feedback. Increasing challenging job demands discusses workload, time pressure, high responsibility and job complexity.







## Work Engagement

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption”. Vigor is defined as experiencing high levels of energy, not easily burnout and willing to contribute more effort during work. Dedication describes about being involved in one’s work and feeling a sense of meaning, enthusiastic, inspiration and challenge towards one’s job. Absorption talks about focus and how engrossed one could be in their work and they tend to forget everything else during work.

## Private University



A private university is a non-profit organization that not funded by the government.

They rely heavily on tuition, investments and private donors, not from taxpayers.

Private universities are generally smaller than public universities (Department of Higher Education, 2017).

## 1.14 Chapter Summary

In a nutshell, chapter one shows the study background, problem statement, research question, objective, delimitation and limitation of the study. Moreover, this chapter provides the guide to proceed for the following chapters. Besides that, readers able to gain a better understanding of variables that will affect work engagement toward private universities in Malaysia.

