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# The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Work Performance: Perceptions and Reflections from Academics in Malaysian Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Using the 'emotional competence framework' developed by Goleman (1998), this research aims to clarify the role that identified antecedents of emotional intelligence play on academics' work performance. Specifically, the research will examine the relationships between self-management, self-awareness, relationship management and social awareness and work performance in higher education. The research comes as a response to the existing literature, which predominantly examines university work performance and employability from a student perspective. This perspective is usually in the context of university-led initiatives and the ability of these initiatives to engender the employability skills students require for a job and the more generic discussion surrounding how prepared graduates feel for a disruptive employment market. Examining academics' perspectives gives some initial insight into the skill sets that academics feel they are developing in the university environment and the role that these skills play in academic performance and ultimately in their contribution to the knowledge economy.

In an increasingly competitive market where workers have to compete against each other as well as the technological alternatives to human capital, namely, automation, machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), academic and practitioner assessments of an individual's work-readiness has gathered momentum. A gap in the literature is apparent in the perspectives of individuals who are teaching those employability skills, specifically, whether these individuals feel that those skills that are less easily automatable are being appropriately developed in their skill set. Using a survey with 103 academics from a university in Malaysia, the research addresses an identified gap in the literature around emotional intelligence and the labor market. The research also informs the wider literature on work performance and advances research in the area of employability in the context of the 4th industrial revolution.

**KEY WORDS:** Human Capital, Higher Education, Emotional Intelligence, 4th Industrial Revolution

**JEL Classification:** J24, I23, E71, F66

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## 1. Introduction

Preparing an individual for employment and furnishing them with the necessary skills to be competitive against 'man and machine' is an often discussed topic in a variety of contexts (Sanchez, 2018). Previous research has focused on the role of educational establishments, how they design the curriculum and how best to embed now-necessary skills such as design thinking, creativity, problem solving, data and digital management, emotional intelligence and the user experience (UX) into academic programs (Ghosh, 2017; Jameson, Carthy, McGuinness, & McSweeney, 2016; Knemeyer, 2015; Stigliani, 2017; Tsaurkubule, 2017). The integration of business-facing activities and industry engagement has been another focus of research, e.g., the evaluation of the use and usefulness of work-based learning (WBL), internships, simulations and games as well as real-world assessments (Galloway, Marks, & Chillias, 2014; Renganathan, Karim & Li, 2012; Turner, Kwong, Beard, & Mulholland, 2018; Vos & Brennan, 2010). Previous research alludes to the underlying debate of responsibility for enabling students who come through the education system to be more employable and involves the main stakeholders, employers, education providers, governments and the students themselves. The reasons for these discussions are as follows: first, the apportionment of responsibility and attempt to address the graduate skills gap; second, the increasing importance of the softer, social skills to employers (Kahn, 2017; National Center for O\*NET Development for USDOL, 2017; Teng & Turner, 2018); and third, the increasingly disruptive market where jobs and skills are being displaced based on economic considerations. Despite both academic and practitioner discussions on the economic, social and political consequences of a disruptive labor market and the roles and responsibilities that identified stakeholders play in preparing future and current employees, there is still a gap in the literature that examines stakeholders' perspectives on the type of skills required by employers and the skills that are not easily automatable. This research will examine the growing importance of softer, emotional skills in the employment market and assess, through the perceptions of academics, whether they feel that they have the requisite skills set and emotional intelligence based upon their university experience and employer training and what they feel are the

implications on the students they teach and their work performance. The findings from this research should prove beneficial to both businesses and universities not only in Malaysia but also across the globe, through providing insight into the importance of understanding emotional intelligence in the selection process of suitable employees and in the choice of training programs to upskill staff and develop the desired 'softer skills', which can result in enhanced productivity as well as student and staff satisfaction.

## 2. Literature Review

Today's worker operates in a disruptive job market brought about by the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR was first evaluated by Klaus Schwab during the World Economic Forum (Peters, 2017; Schwab, 2016) and highlighted how technological advancement has changed the way individuals live, work and connect with each other. The use of digital platforms and the flexibility of intersystem connectivity over cybernetworks have increased significantly during the 4IR (Marr, 2016; McCabe, 2016; Sharman, 2018), enabling society to have more convenience but perhaps encouraging an overreliance upon these technological advancements to assist society in performing tasks at home and at work (Marr, 2016; McCabe, 2016; Schwab, 2016).

Autonomous vehicles, advanced robotics or additive manufacturing are some of the tangible outcomes that advanced technologies could bring, while intangible areas, such as gigabit connections and cloud computerization, enable seamless linking and data exchange between machines and people (Schwab, 2017). The paradigm shift brought about by the 4IR will arguably significantly impact a nation's and a business's economic growth, employment opportunities, skills required for employment, business processes and operations, and customer expectations (Schwab, 2017).

### 2.1 Labor market

A closer look into the consequences for labor market indicates that the 4IR will lead to 'beneficiaries' and 'victims' as business transitions itself from a reliance on human-oriented tasks to the integration of more machine substitution. MacCarthy (2014) argued that the 4IR could lead us to an era of technological unemployment. In other words, the rate of change brought

about by the 4IR could lead to a degree of uncertainty surrounding the future of labor market (MacCarthy, 2014; Peters, 2017). Will more manual and repetitive jobs be replaced by automation? Will skilled workers be replaced by AI? Which sectors are the most and least vulnerable to the creep of technology? This discussion is not new, and similar concerns were raised in the earlier industrial revolutions. The Luddites' rebellion in Britain (Harris, 2018) and the rise of machinery during the American Great Depression of the 1920s (Baker, 2018) are illustrations of the fears and consequences of a rise in the use of machinery and its relationship with work and employment. Interestingly, if we are to again reflect on previous industrial revolutions, unemployment rates have not changed significantly with relatively similar peaks and troughs based on supply and demand. In other words, it could be argued that the increased use of technology in business could create new jobs as well as make existing jobs redundant in equal measure. Rather than being perceived as a 'doomsday scenario', the 4IR could contribute to a potential drop in unemployment rates (Bloom, McKenna, & Prettnner, 2018; Nakamura & Zeira, 2018).

## 2.2 Employability skills and employee future-proofing

It was argued earlier that the 4IR could create new jobs and unemployment in relatively equal measures (Bloom et al., 2018; Eberhard et al., 2017; Hallett & Hutt, 2016; Teng, Ma, Pahlevan, & Turner, 2019), with no sector exempt from its effects (Chui, Manyika, & Miremadi, 2016). However, it is likely that low-skilled and less-educated individuals will be the worst affected (Marr, 2016; Schwab, 2016). Repetitive tasks, previously the bastion of lower-skilled individuals, are likely to be increasingly squeezed as business migrates towards machine-oriented processing as part of the initiative to increase output and reduce labor cost (Wolter et al., 2015). Technological growth during the 4IR could eliminate the redundancy in routine tasks and lead to job displacement among low-skilled workers but an upturn in the demand for high-skilled workers (Flynn, Dance, & Schaefer, 2017; Weber, 2016).

Given the potential threat to workers, particularly low-skilled workers, identified stakeholders, students, employers, governments and educational establishments need to ensure that future workers are equipped

with the relevant skills to avoid obsolescence in the workplace and long-term unemployment. However, given the relative unpredictability and pace of change of the disruptive market, it is rather difficult to anticipate which skills will be required. Previous research has focused on those skills that are less susceptible to computerization, 'perception and manipulation', 'creative intelligence' and 'social intelligence' (National Center for O\*NET Development for USDOL, 2017). Previous research has also highlighted the responsibility for developing these skills and preparing individuals for the future labor market with educational establishments (Eberhard et al., 2017). However, it is unlikely that education providers alone can tackle the issues of technological unemployment (Peters, 2017) in addition, employers, governments and students themselves need to work collectively to address graduates' skills gap and obtain some sort of consensus on the skills required for future employees (Gyanwali, 2018). As recent research on human capital and its impact on firm performance illustrates, having the appropriate skills is direct related to work and firm performance (Bonekamp & Sure, 2015; Fedyk et al., 2017; O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011).

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of hard skills in a worker's employability armory, including teamwork, project management, leadership, creative thinking and problem solving (Draycott & Rae, 2011; Jones & Iredale, 2010; Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011; The Bank for International Settlements [BIS], 2015; Turner & Mulholland, 2017). However, in the disruptive market, these skills alone are arguably insufficient, with smart machines and AI readily capable of imitating and, in many cases, able "to do pretty much anything that humans can do, and they would be better at doing that" (World Economic Forum, 2016). There is a need for workers to develop soft skills, which are those associated with interacting with others, demonstrating social skills, confidence and self-reflection (Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2007; Bennett, Dunne, & Carre, 1999; Clarke, 2016; Gallivan, Truex, & Kvasny, 2004; Jameson et al., 2016; Rao, 2013; 2014; Sail & Alavi, 2010).

The current literature has highlighted that social and cognitive skills (i.e., negotiation, communication skills and emotional intelligence) are considered the most important skills for the future employment mar-

ket (Eberhard *et al.*, 2017; Suleman, 2016). However, there is arguably a 'gap' between the skills workers have and the skills employers desire, hence the pressure placed on education institutions to embed the necessary skill sets into the curriculum and have academic staff support the cultivation of these soft skills.

### 2.3 Emotional intelligence

As alluded to earlier, emotional intelligence is usually contextualized in social intelligence, hence the reasons for the use of the phrases related to the emotion of the self and an awareness or recognition of emotion in others (Jameson *et al.*, 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence can be defined as a collection of emotional abilities, the processing of emotional information and the management and reasoning of emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Similarly, to other indicators of intelligence, not everyone has the same level of emotional awareness, which has important implications for the ability of educational establishments and employers to teach and develop emotional intelligence in individuals and for emotional intelligence to be learned.

As a result of the work by Salovey and Mayer (1990), a number of interpretations and models have been developed that advance research in the area of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2007). Arguably, the work of Goleman (1995) is the most relevant to this research, given that it reflects on whether emotional intelligence and its intrinsic skill set can be learned or taught (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and on the link between emotional intelligence and life criteria (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The 'emotional competence framework' by Goleman (1995) can be classified as competency-based, which is one of three theoretical approaches to understanding emotional intelligence. The other two approaches are ability-based (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and trait-based (Bar-On, 1997).

Goleman (1995) proposed a model that took into account an individual's abilities and personality and applied their individual and collective effects on work performance. Through the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI), emotional intelligence was measured using a 360-degree assessment, similar to staff and student feedback used in educational establishments. This

360-degree assessment incorporated self-reporting, direct-reporting and peer ratings (Goleman, 1995; Ugoani, Amu, & Kalu, 2015), measuring 20 competencies around the four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. Goleman (1998) later proposed five dimensions grouped around personal and social skills (Goleman, 1998): self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and relationship management, which expanded upon the original four dimensions. These dimensions capture the essence of emotional intelligence: to have self-awareness of one's own feelings, to be able to assess and manage one's own emotions as well as to strive to improve, to relate to the emotions of others and to cooperate and resolve conflict (Goleman, 1998; Ugoani *et al.*, 2015). This is why this research has integrated the two propositions, as supported by the other measurement models described earlier. The identified dimensions include self-management (including initiative, optimism, adaptability and transparency; linked to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), Mayer *et al.*, 2000); self-awareness (including emotional awareness, self-assessment and self-confidence; included in the EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997)); social awareness (empathy, organizational power and service orientation; included in the EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997)); and relationship management (developing others, demonstrating leadership and initiating and managing change; included in the EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997)), as well as an examination of the relationship individually and collectively with work performance.

Goleman (1998) argues that emotional intelligence impacts employee performance and the effectiveness of completing tasks, with the management of emotions and ability to retain a positive mental state directly related to work performance (Carmeli, 2003; Mohamad & Jais, 2015). Previous research on emotional intelligence and its relationship with work performance reveals the importance of emotional self-awareness and management as well as social awareness and constructing relationships with others (Liptak, 2005; Shaffer and Shaffer, 2005; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). As previously discussed, the hard and soft employability skills that allow individuals to achieve and be better in their profession are complemented by emotional intelligence and an individual's ability to be self-aware, to self-manage, to have social awareness and to construct

relationships. This research will further evaluate the following relationships with work performance:

H1: Relationship management (RM) has a statistically significant relationship with work performance (WP).

H2: Self-management (SM) has a statistically significant relationship with work performance (WP).

H3: Self-awareness (SeA) has a statistically significant relationship with work performance (WP).

H4: Social awareness (SOA) has a statistically significant relationship with work performance (WP).

Research into the importance of emotional intelligence, both individually and collectively in the context of softer skills and the role they play in employability and performance, has been performed previously (Bennett et al., 1999; Chamorro-Premuzic, Artech, Bremner, Greven, & Furnham, 2010; Coetzee & Beukes, 2010; Jameson, et al., 2016; Pool & Sewell, 2007), albeit not exhaustively. This study not only consolidates existing research in the area of emotional intelligence but also advances research by analyzing academics' perceptions of their own emotional intelligence and its importance to work performance. This insight should prove particularly useful to academics in universities across the globe, given that those academics are supporting student learning and developing the next generation of the workforce. Those graduates will need to be prepared, given the disruptive nature of the labor market, for different job requirements, both in terms of skills and employment status and increasing reliance on emotional intelligence, particularly if they choose self-employment and self-management in the gig economy.

### 3. Methodology

In 2018, the study distributed 150 self-report questionnaires among university academics; 103 questionnaires were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 68.7%. Academics were considered an important group to survey given the lack of literature on this particular segment of the workforce and the fact that those individuals are directly involved in developing the skills set of graduates, which is an area of recent research in the context of the graduate skills gap. The methodological approach allowed insight into academic perceptions of emotional intelligence and the role self-management, self-awareness, relation-

ship management and social awareness played in work performance. However, it is acknowledged that the purposive sampling technique carries the limitation that only those academics who attended the research workshop for that day were surveyed. This was not considered a major limitation because 103 represents approximately 30% of the staff employed at the institution and therefore is broadly representative of the staff population in terms of gender and ethnic background. The sample size limitation is further being addressed in a larger comparative study of universities across Malaysia.

To address the issues of the understandability and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with academics at Malaysian University; a Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was also performed on the data. The pilot study revealed that respondents understood the wording of the questions and did not think there were any misleading or redundant questions included.

The questionnaire items were developed from a review of the emotional intelligence and soft employment skills literature, with a number of components adapted from the empirically tested Emotional Competence Framework by Goleman (1995) and with work performance measured by the appraisal ratings (Langhorn, 2004). The questionnaire used a 1–5 Likert scale (where 'strongly disagree' was scored as 1 and 'strongly agree' was scored as 5) and was divided into two sections. In the first section, the respondents were asked about their demographic details. The second section consists of questions related to emotional intelligence and included the variables found in the research framework, namely, RM, SM, SeA, SoA, and WP.

This study employed the structural equation modeling technique to investigate the research variables using Partial Least Squares variance-based software. The SmartPLS software was developed by Ringle, Wende & Will (2005). Andersen and Gerbing (1988) suggested the use of the two-step analysis for this purpose. The first step involved testing the measurement model, while the second procedure involved an examination of the structural model (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Ramayah, Lee, & Boey, 2011; Ramayah, Yeap, & Ignatius, 2013). The measurement model was tested by an examination of its reliability and validity. Upon confirmation of the

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of the respondents

|                       |         | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|---------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>         | Male    | 27.7           |
|                       | Female  | 72.3           |
| <b>Marital status</b> | Single  | 37.9           |
|                       | Married | 62.1           |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>      | Chinese | 59.4           |
|                       | Indian  | 29.7           |
|                       | Malay   | 6.9            |
|                       | Others  | 4.0            |

model's reliability and validity, the study's hypotheses were tested by examination of the structural model. Henseler, Wilson, and Westberg (2011) indicate that PLS-SEM is an appropriate technique in handling formative constructs, while Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2013) argued that the technique caters to studies with small sample sizes. Following the approach suggested by Hair *et al.* (2014), a bootstrapping technique involving 1000 resamples was used to examine whether the loadings and explanatory coefficients were significant. The path coefficients of the model were estimated using the PLS algorithm.

#### 4. Discussion and Analysis

Of a total of 103 respondents, 72.3% were females, and 27.7% were males, as shown in **Table 1**. The largest ethnic group was Chinese respondents (59.4%), followed by Indians (29.7%) and Malays (6.9%). Regarding marital status, 62.1% of the respondents were married, and 37.9% were single.

##### 4.1 Measurement Model

To evaluate the measurement model, there was a need to examine two categories of validity, that is, the convergent validity and the discriminant validity (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991), as it is "the portion of the model that specifies how the observed variables depend on the unobserved, composite, or latent variables" (Arbuckle, 2005, 113, p. 89).

The first category of validity of the measurement model was the convergent validity, which was used to test how well the multiple items measure any particular construct. The convergent validity was achieved by examining the composite reliability, the average variance extracted (AVE), the item factor loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the significance of the outer loadings (Gefen & Straub, 2005). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), three requirements must be fulfilled for the measurement items in each construct to have convergent validity. The three requirements are that the composite reliability values must not be less than 0.7, the average amount of variance in indicator variables that each construct explains (AVE) must have a value higher than 0.5, and the factor loadings for each item in all constructs must be higher than 0.5.

As shown in **Table 2**, the composite reliability values, which range from 0.832 to 0.872, exceed the recommended value of 0.7 (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Staples & Seddon, 2004). The Cronbach's alpha values for all the constructs (ranging from 0.732 to 0.865) are all above 0.7, the cut-off recommended by Nunnally (1978). Fornell and Larcker (1981) mentioned that the composite reliability and the Cronbach's alpha values are used to assess the internal consistency of the scales used to measure each construct.

The average variance extracted (AVE) values, as shown in **Table 2**, are all above 0.5, as suggested by

Table 2. Measures of Internal Consistency

| Scale                               | No. of Items | Item Description  | Loadings | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | R <sup>2</sup> | AVE   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|---|----------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------|
| <b>Relationship Management (RM)</b> | 4            | RM1 - I work as a team with others towards achieving our common goals.      | 0.560    | 0.756            | 0.847                 |                | 0.586 |
|                                     |              | RM2 - I communicate well with my fellow colleagues.                         | 0.773    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | RM3 - I am able to maintain personal friendships among my work colleagues.  | 0.863    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | RM4 - I have the skill to persuade people.                                  | 0.829    |                  |                       |                |       |
| <b>Self-Management (SM)</b>         | 4            | SM1 - I am able to manage stress well.                                      | 0.731    | 0.732            | 0.832                 |                | 0.557 |
|                                     |              | SM2 - I can easily adapt to changes.  | 0.782    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SM3 - I meet my commitments/keep my promises                                | 0.832    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SM4 - I am able to handle multiple demands/tasks.                           | 0.623    |                  |                       |                |       |
| <b>Self-Awareness (SeA)</b>         | 4            | SeA1 - I can pinpoint exactly what aspect of a problem upsets me.           | 0.667    | 0.764            | 0.848                 |                | 0.584 |
|                                     |              | SeA2 - I am aware of what my strengths and weaknesses are.                  | 0.804    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SeA3 - I never go against my principles regardless of the situation         | 0.817    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SeA4 - Strong emotions never interfere with the quality of my performance.  | 0.762    |                  |                       |                |       |
| <b>Social Awareness (SOA)</b>       | 5            | SoA1 - I care about people's thoughts and feelings.                         | 0.708    | 0.825            | 0.872                 |                | 0.532 |
|                                     |              | SoA2 - I relate well to people from various backgrounds.                    | 0.774    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SoA3 - I am able to sense when there is tension in a meeting.               | 0.690    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SoA4 - I am tolerant when I'm dealing with an unreasonable customer.        | 0.763    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | SoA5 - I will offer help to new staff in terms of mentoring them.           | 0.751    |                  |                       |                |       |
| <b>Work Performance (WP)</b>        | 5            | WP1 - I adhere strictly to a professional code of ethics.                   | 0.776    | 0.772            | 0.847                 | 0.492          | 0.530 |
|                                     |              | WP2 - I am enthusiastic about learning and executing new tasks/assignments. | 0.730    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | WP3 - I meet deadlines for the tasks that I am given.                       | 0.770    |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | WP4 - I work well with others to ensure the efficiency of the team.         | 0.803216 |                  |                       |                |       |
|                                     |              | WP5 - I assume responsibility/am accountable for my work.                   | 0.525063 |                  |                       |                |       |

Note: a: Composite Reliability (CR) =  $(\sum \text{factor loading})^2 / \{(\sum \text{factor loading})^2 + \sum (\text{variance of error})\}$

b: Average variance extracted (AVE) =  $\sum (\text{factor loading})^2 / (\sum (\text{factor loading})^2 + \sum (\text{variance of error}))$

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity

|                              | Relationship Management (RM) | Self-Management (SM) | Self Awareness (SeA) | Social Awareness (SOA) | Work Performance (WP) |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Relationship Management (RM) | 0.765                        |                      |                      |                        |                       |
| Self-Management (SM)         | 0.348                        | 0.746                |                      |                        |                       |
| Self-Awareness (SeA)         | 0.308                        | 0.391                | 0.764                |                        |                       |
| Social Awareness (SOA)       | 0.359                        | 0.401                | 0.207                | 0.729                  |                       |
| Work Performance (WP)        | 0.554                        | 0.478                | 0.452                | 0.487                  | 0.728                 |

Note: Correlation estimated between the factors; diagonal: square root of AVE

Hair *et al.* (2010). These AVE values, which ranged from 0.530 to 0.584, reflect the proportion of variance in a construct that is not due to measurement error. The findings indicated in **Table 2** also revealed that each factor loading of all items of every construct ranged from 0.56 to 0.863, thus exceeding 0.50, the recommended cut-off value.

Since the AVE for each construct is above 0.5, while the Cronbach's alpha and construct reliability values are all above 0.7 and the t-statistic of the outer loading is greater than 1.96 (Gefen & Straub, 2005), we confirm that convergent validity for each construct RM, SM, SeA, SOA, and WP does exist. The results in **Table 2** clearly demonstrate that all constructs in this study are valid (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 1998).

The additional category of validity associated with the measurement model is the discriminant validity, which is used to test the degree to which one can discriminate between dissimilar constructs. The discriminant validity enables us to confirm the construct validity of the outer model by examining the degree to which the items of a particular scale measure only the construct they should measure (Whitley, 2002). According to Cheung and Matthew (2010), if the measure of a particular construct of interest is poorly correlated with the measure of all other constructs, this demonstrates the existence of discriminant validity. To verify the discriminant validity, the study used the Fornell

and Larcker (1981) criterion that compares the AVE-square roots for each construct with the correlations of all other constructs in the study. (see **Table 3**). The values on the diagonals (AVE-square roots) must be greater than the corresponding row and column correlation values for discriminant validity to be confirmed.

As shown in **Table 3**, AVE-square roots for each construct are greater than the correlation values for all other constructs being compared, revealing the existence of discriminant validity (Gefen & Straub, 2005; Hair *et al.*, 1998). The results of the convergent and discriminant validity shown in **Table 2** and **Table 3** confirm the adequacy of the measurement model, thus allowing us to proceed further by assessing the structural model to test the research hypotheses.

#### 4.2 Structural Model

Hair *et al.* (2014) recommended the use of R-squared, beta and the corresponding t-values via a bootstrapping procedure to evaluate the structural model. The study's hypotheses are tested by the evaluation of the structural model with the results in **Table 4**, revealing that three hypotheses are supported, while one is not supported. The R-squared value of 0.492 for this model is above the 0.26 value recommended by Cohen (1988), signifying this study's model to be substantial.

In examining the predictors of work performance, the results reveal that RM, SeA and SOA are significant predictors of work performance, while self-manage-

**Table 4.** Path Estimates

|           | Hypotheses                   |                  | Beta  | S. Error | t-statistic | Decision      |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------|-------|----------|-------------|---------------|
| <b>H1</b> | Relationship Management (RM) | Work Performance | 0.333 | 0.072    | 4.626       | Supported     |
| <b>H2</b> | Self-Management (SM)         | Work Performance | 0.171 | 0.100    | 1.705       | Not Supported |
| <b>H3</b> | Self-Awareness (SeA)         | Work Performance | 0.230 | 0.095    | 2.416       | Supported     |
| <b>H4</b> | Social Awareness (SOA)       | Work Performance | 0.251 | 0.088    | 2.867       | Supported     |

ment is not. Relationship management, social awareness and self-awareness are positively related to work performance, explaining 49.2% of the variance in work performance. Relationship management ( $\beta = 0.333$ ,  $t = 4.626$ ) is the most significant predictor of work performance, followed by social awareness ( $\beta = 0.251$ ,  $t = 2.867$ ) and self-awareness ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $t = 2.416$ ). Self-management does not significantly predict work performance. Based on the findings, we conclude that hypotheses H1, H3 and H4 are supported, while hypothesis H2 is not supported.

The empirical evidence shows that work performance is significantly and positively impacted by the emotional intelligence components of relationship management, self-awareness and social awareness, which is supported by the literature (Liptak, 2005; Shaffer & Shaffer, 2005; Zeidner et al., 2004). It is interesting to note, however, that relationship management has a greater impact on work performance than self-awareness (0.333 compared to 0.230) and social awareness (0.333 compared to 0.251). These results indicate that emotional intelligence is related to work performance among academics, which has implications for graduates and underlines the need to ensure that academics are trained to develop those skills. The results also illustrate the importance of initiating and managing change, demonstrating leadership and developing the needs of others to make the workplace more conducive and people-friendly to significantly increase work performance. Relationship management enhances the work performance of the individual and the collective through a better and more meaningful understanding of the work environment and its relationship to better work performance (Goleman, 1998).

Self-awareness and social awareness were also found to significantly enhance work performance, which is perhaps unsurprising given the relationship of the two variables to relationship management. With regard to social awareness, to develop relationships with others, an individual must be confident and aware of their own emotions, which include their capabilities and frailties (Goleman, 1998). Similarly, an individual must have empathy, the ability to read intergroup relationships and the ability to anticipate of the needs of various subordinates (Goleman, 1998).

It was noteworthy that the study revealed no relationship between self-management and work performance, which was perhaps surprising on a superficial level given that self-management has a relationship with self-awareness first, with individuals needing to demonstrate initiative, and with relationship management second, with individuals needing to adapt and achieve. Referring to the literature, all four emotional intelligence variables are argued to impact work performance (Liptak, 2005; Shaffer & Shaffer, 2005; Zeidner et al., 2004). Therefore, these findings that academics saw no relationship between self-management and work performance may have had more to do with the work environment or perhaps the ethnic background of the respondents. If we were to accept the first proposition, this would ignore the fact that the work of academics is predominantly individual and involving self-management, so perhaps this explanation is less likely. A more likely explanation may be found in the ethnic composition of the respondents, predominantly Chinese individuals, who arguably prefer instruction and direction from a respected superior rather than self-directed management (Teng & Turner, 2018). Such a statement does, however, require further

quantification, with further research needed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-management and work performance specifically among academics and then across other sectors and between countries.

## 5. Conclusion

The study informs business on the importance of emotional intelligence on work performance, which impacts not only the Malaysian economy but also the global economy. The study consolidates existing research on emotional intelligence and the antecedents that impact employees' work performance, revealing the impacts of self-awareness, social awareness and relationship management on work performance. However, self-management was not found to have a relationship with work performance, which was perhaps surprising given that respondents felt that they were self-aware, i.e., that they had the ability to self-assess, have confidence and be emotionally aware. The study also advances the research by revealing the relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance among academics and the possible role of ethnic background. The findings are particularly interesting for academics and practitioners given the increasing popularity of the gig economy, which is a term reserved not only for those who are self-employed. The gig economy embodies the practices of self-management, self-awareness, a degree of social awareness and the ability to construct relationships; that is, the current disruptive employment market and workplace increasingly demand strong emotional intelligence to ensure that work performance is not negatively impacted within a challenging self-disciplined environment.

The research reveals that academics in Malaysian universities need not only to possess high levels of emotional intelligence to perform their work effectively but also to ensure that they equip future graduates with appropriate levels of soft skills and emotional intelligence so that they are prepared for emerging jobs and jobs that are increasingly reliant upon a set of skills that are different from those required 10 years ago. Graduates may choose to pursue freelance gigs and/or short-term jobs, having more autonomy on where, when and how they work; this approach requires emotional intelligence to ensure they perform well in such work. Therefore, universities must embed emotional intelligence and its antecedents into

curriculum design, delivery and staff training if they wish to enhance workplace performance (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011), stress management, conflict resolution (Jordan & Troth, 2004), and team performance (Chang, Sy, & Choi, 2012). Staff would then be better situated to deliver a more future appropriate student experience encompassing both academic content and transferable skills to enhance graduate employability (Rasiah, 2009, pp. 5-6).

With regard to the practical implications of this research, employers could consider applying the findings from this research to develop an emotional intelligence scorecard to assess candidates' skills in relation to work performance. Universities could use the research findings to enhance their respective staff-training programs to improve emotional intelligence and enhance academic work performance. Such training programs could be part of staff appraisal and performance indicators to encourage self-development among academics and the self-directed application of emotional intelligence that benefits from the existing blend of hard and soft skills currently integrated in training initiatives and the academic curriculum.

There are four areas of further research identified by this study. The first area is to gain more insight from academics across ASEAN countries to generalize the findings from this study, provide comparative analyses between academics and offer conclusions regarding the role of ethnic background. The second area is to incorporate a qualitative dimension into the research to investigate why there were statistically significant relationships between self-awareness, social awareness and relationship management and work performance and no relationship between self-management and work performance. The third area, and one that is related to the first identified area of further research, would be to investigate the role of ethnic background, emotional intelligence and their importance to work performance across business sectors and, as a consequence, their impact on the economy. Finally, as part of the business ecosystem, a study could take into account the perspectives of employers. Their perspectives on the criticality of emotional intelligence with the context of formal education or working experiences is an area that would benefit from further research and provide a more holistic view of the relationships between education, employers, the graduate skills gap and work performance.

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