



## Understanding effective professional employee management from the perspective of McGregor's theory of X and Y

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### ABSTRACT

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#### Keywords

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between key drivers of effective management of professional employees in Malaysian universities. We adapt McGregor's Theory of X and Y to identify three key drivers: employee feedback, reward, and work freedom. Utilizing a cross-sectional design, the research instruments for this study were derived from prior studies. A total of 156 online questionnaires were collected from professional employees working at Malaysian universities. We tested the research hypotheses using SPSS Version 26.0. The findings of the analysis demonstrate that each of the primary factors, namely employee feedback, reward, and work freedom, exhibits a statistically significant and positive influence on the attainment of effective management. This study demonstrates that effective management, which directly affects the professionalism of university employees, is significantly influenced by employee feedback, reward, and work freedom. The study's findings have crucial implications for policymakers and other stakeholders in the education sector. The results can be utilized to develop comprehensive guidelines that promote effective management and enhance professionalism among university employees.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study illuminates the impact of feedback, rewards, and work freedom on effective management in Malaysian universities, with work freedom being crucial. These findings can guide institutions in improving performance management, establishing trust, and creating a conducive environment for staff.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of a company or organization in attaining its predetermined objectives and goals is directly impacted by the manner in which it is managed. In order for an organization to have any chance of accomplishing what it sets out to do, it must have leadership that is not only powerful but also efficient (Wang, Lin, Osman, Farooq, & Raju, 2021). As a direct result of this, a strong organization will assist its professional employees in being

responsible and in maintaining a good staffing order, and it will do so by providing assistance to those employees. Because of this, effective management will, in the end, result in the growth of the organization being realized as a direct consequence of the growth. In addition, there is a correlation between universities that have robust management systems and excellent academic performance, just as there is a correlation between the success of an organization and its effective management. Therefore, in order to ensure effective university management, managers need to make use of strategies that are both practical and effective in order to increase the motivation of professional employees to perform to the best of their abilities. This will guarantee that the university is administered in the most efficient manner possible (Rubera, Ngala, & Ngu, 2022).

Any organization's management is one of the most important factors in increasing productivity, which in turn leads to the achievement of organizational success in the long run (Kumari, Barkat, Noor, & Abbas, 2021). The progression and growth of an organization are directly attributable to the quality of the management that is provided (Almadhoun, 2022). It lowers absenteeism while simultaneously increasing productivity, which leads to improved management of the organization as well as the staff (Bipath & Naidoo, 2021). When it comes to fostering the development of more professional behaviours among university employees, having an effective management structure in place is unquestionably one of the most advantageous factors that can be considered. On the other hand, ineffective management is the primary reason why an organization is unable to accomplish what it has set out to do, such as meeting its goals and objectives. This is because effective management requires an organization to have clear goals and objectives. It results in an increase in the number of employees quitting their jobs as a result of the situation (Birkenhead, 2021). It is possible for ineffective management to bring about the demise of an organization because workers will look elsewhere for employment opportunities that offer better management systems. This can cause a chain reaction that leads to the organization's demise. As a consequence of this, an organization will enter a state characterized by low levels of productivity and unprofessionalism. Universities are a critical sector within an organization due to their direct involvement in shaping the future of a country's economy. Consequently, the implementation of efficient management practices becomes imperative in order to ensure the provision of academic excellence to students, who play a pivotal role in determining the trajectory of the nation's economic development (Iloh, 2021). It is a direct consequence of the fact that universities deal directly with the future of the economy of the country that management, both effective and ineffective, plays an important part in the organization. In addition to this, they are directly reliant on the responsibilities that employees have as well as the ethical and professional behaviour of those employees. And the growth of the organization is either positively or negatively impacted by their presence, depending on how they are utilized.

The information that was gathered from researchers such as Desalegn (2017), Galani and Galanakis (2022), and Wangdi and Tobgay (2022) under the management theories of X and Y provides a good understanding of the effective management of professional employees. Their research centres on how factors such as motivation, reward, trust, professional conduct, and work freedom are related to effective management practices. There are still some gaps in the research, despite the fact that the significance of effective management has been the subject of a significant amount of study. It is necessary to conduct additional research into the relationship between the independent variables of employee feedback, reward, and freedom at work and how they influence the dependent variable of effective management of professional employees in Malaysian universities.

### 1.1. Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Y

Management that is both efficient and effective has a significant competitive advantage in the flourishing universities of Malaysia and in organizations in general. As a result, Douglas McGregor's "Theory of X and Y" assists in the provision of a systematic workflow that contributes to the effective management of professional employees in the workplace. Theory X is used to describe the authoritarian management style, and theory Y is used to describe the participative management style (Tedla & Redda, 2021). According to the X theory, if a manager

observes that a professional employee does not have any natural motivation for their work and dislikes it, the manager should consider various ways to improve the employee's focus on their work in order to boost the employee's natural motivation for their work. For example, they give bonuses for excellent performance and deductions for mistakes (Galani & Galanakis, 2022). As a consequence of this, it has the potential to assist in the enhancement of the employees' level of concentration. Employees at a university who refuse to carry out their responsibilities in the appropriate manner are subject to a summons and suspension as a form of disciplinary action. At the same time, there are rewards and bonuses available for exceptionally good work. As a consequence of this, managers ought to make use of the authority they possess in order to fulfil their responsibilities as supervisors. Theory Y outlines the participatory considerations that lead managers to the conclusion that their staff members are capable of managing their responsibilities with a minimum of oversight (Muthuku, 2020). Their managers motivate and encourage them to do their best work as a result (Sorensen & Yaeger, 2021). The managers take pride in their work and are thrilled to work with employees who possess such a high level of expertise. In a similar vein, the university adopted Theory Y in order to incentivize its staff members to work together on collaborative projects and its academic departments to work together in order to achieve academic excellence. Theory Y encourages employees to exercise autonomy in the workplace while simultaneously requiring them to take responsibility for their actions. As a direct consequence of this, there are fewer instances of engagement and frustration for managers as they supervise the work of their employees. The management theories X and Y developed by Douglas McGregor, and more specifically, the application of theory Y, give employees both a clear understanding of the work expectations that are placed on them as well as the freedom to perform their work to the best of their ability. Therefore, implementing it in Malaysian universities will lead to exceptional levels of academic achievement. As a consequence of this, the country's future economic characteristics will be significantly improved, as the most talented students will have the opportunity to realize their full potential.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

As was discussed in the preceding section, effective management is necessary in order to maintain a professional atmosphere among the university's staff and students. Because of this, professionalism is absolutely necessary because it is directly dependent on the management system that the university ultimately implements. Employees also benefit from professionalism because it makes it easier for them to recognize and address any management issues that may arise within the organization (Mbegu, 2018). When applying management to professionals, it is fairly typical for any organization to face significant obstacles. These challenges can range from simple to complex. To begin, in the event that there is a drop in performance, managers who are unable to review the processes and procedures of work within the organization may discover that their employees are producing less work than they typically do. Lack of communication within an organization is another challenge that must be overcome. When communication channels are insufficient, as they often are when there are personality differences among team members, it is difficult for managers to supervise the work of their teams (Subramaniam, Ismail, Rani, & Mahdiyar, 2022). Discrimination against employees can lead to a decrease in performance in workplaces that have insufficient staffing levels (Bhui, Dinos, Galant-Miecznikowska, De Jongh, & Stansfeld, 2016). Ineffective teamwork in university departments is the primary culprit behind ineffective communication channels, which in turn leads to a lack of communication between management and employees. The difficulties that professionals engaged in effective management face are the root cause of the issues associated with ineffective management. When employees occasionally experience a disconnect from their place of employment due to a decrease in motivation from managers, this can be a sign of a poor culture in the workplace (Sull, Sull, & Zweig, 2022). The lack of a robust organizational structure is another factor that contributes to ineffective management (Eze, Bello, & Adekola, 2017; Mosadeghrad & Ansarian, 2014). It's possible that a manager will need to keep a close eye on their employees, but that will depend on the workplace (Connelly, Fieseler, Černe, Giessner, & Wong, 2021). To maintain high levels of

productivity, professional employees need to be motivated, and in the absence of an effective organizational structure, productivity will suffer (Semente & Nandjungu, 2020).

In addition, the cultures of corporations need to be revised on a regular basis so that managers can effectively plan their interactions with professional employees. The challenges that stand in the way of effective management of professional employees in Malaysian organizations and universities can be circumnavigated with the help of a well-thought-out strategic plan. Both of Douglas McGregor's management theories, X and Y, place an emphasis on the use of rewards as a solution. Employees frequently have the misconception that it is in their best interest to seek monetary compensation for the work that they perform (Sudiardhita, Mukhtar, Hartono, Sariwulan, & Nikensari, 2018). According to Azabo, Gaitte, Anumaka, and Wunti (2020), the process of remuneration acts as a motivator for workers, as they are encouraged to put in more effort in order to receive compensation; as a result, the management system is simplified. According to the theory, feedback and freedom are also tactics that can be used to overcome difficulties associated with management. Employees should be able to freely communicate their thoughts and suggestions to the management team (Patro, 2013; Roberson & Perry, 2022), and supervisors should do their best to offer consistent, positive feedback and comments (Chanana, 2021). Additionally, desirable feedback inspires employees to feel valued and comprehended while at work, which is a significant motivator for productivity (Newman & Ford, 2021). In a similar vein, responses to feedback provided by employees and students at a university can serve to motivate workers and improve the institution's ability to achieve its goals and objectives (Joughin, Boud, Dawson, & Tai, 2021). In light of this, our research hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Employer feedback has a significant positive effect on effective management.*

*Hypothesis 2: Reward has a significant positive effect on effective management.*

*Hypothesis 3: Work freedom has a significant positive effect on effective management.*

Following is a conceptual framework that was constructed based on a review of the relevant literature and the theory that lies beneath it (refer to Figure 1).

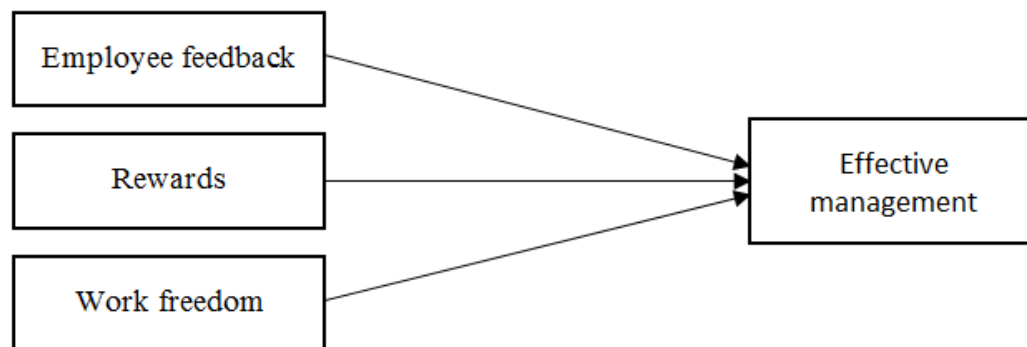


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Samples

The participants in this study were professional university employees in Malaysia. The sample size was calculated using G\*Power. The research model includes three predictors: statistical power of 0.95, significance level of 0.05, and effect size of 0.15, yielding a minimum sample size of 156. Because of this, we can say with certainty that our study, which included 156 participants and had a power of greater than 0.95, was sufficiently large and that its conclusions could be relied upon. The data was collected using the snowball sampling method. The questionnaires are then distributed to professional employees via email. Next, the participant was asked to suggest additional individuals from the sample frame whom they believed would be ideal survey participants. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of respondents, 86 (55%), were female, while the male counterparts were 70 (45%). In terms of age, the majority of respondents (24.36%) were between the ages of 35 and

44. This was followed by 23.08% in the 55-64 age range, and the least represented age range was 65 and above, which had only 9.65% of the respondents. In terms of ethnicity, local Asians made up 64.10% of the workforce. African employees made up 10.90% of all respondents. American and European respondents made up 20.50% of the total, while other ethnic groups made up 4.50% of the total. In terms of years of experience, 29.50% of respondents had 5-10 years. 21.2% had 1-5 years of experience, and 19.2% had 11-20 and 21-35 years of service in their current institutions, respectively. The lowest representation was 1.28% of those over the age of 45.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents (N=156).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	70	45
	Female	86	55
Age	18-24	13	8.3
	25-34	22	14.1
	35-44	38	24.4
	45-54	32	20.5
	55-64	36	23.1
	65+	15	9.7
Ethnicity	African	17	10.9
	American	22	14.1
	European	10	6.4
	Asian	100	64.1
	Other	7	4.5
Years of employment	Less than 5 years	33	21.2
	5-10 years	46	29.5
	11-20 years	30	19.2
	21-35 years	30	19.2
	36-45 years	15	9.6
	More than 45 years	2	1.3

### 3.2. Measurement

This study uses a questionnaire to collect data from university employees of private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The final form has 5 sections adopted from Jaures (2020) and Rubera et al. (2022). The first four sections include 5 items for effective management, 5 items for employee feedback, 5 items for rewards, and 5 items for work freedom. The last section is on demographic variables, which include gender, age, ethnicity, and years of employment. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The Cronbach alpha ranges from 0.790 to 0.880.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

We used Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 to analyse the data. To put the study's objectives to the test, several levels of analysis were performed. The data was subjected to descriptive analyses in order to determine the frequency distribution of the respondents' backgrounds. The Pearson Correlation Analysis was then used to investigate the relationships between employee feedback, rewards, work freedom, and effective management. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the distinct predictors of effective management. A significance value of .05 was used as the cut-off point for all statistical tests.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation results between employee feedback, reward, work freedom, and effective management. A positive correlation was found between employee feedback and effective management ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggested that professional employees who perceived more positive employee feedback tended to engage in more effective management. A significant relationship exists between reward and effective management ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Professional employees who are rewarded more often report higher levels of

effective management. Work freedom and effective management were discovered to be highly correlated ( $r = 0.91, p < 0.001$ ). This suggested that professional employees who perceived more work freedom reported more effective management.

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis used to investigate the predictors of effective management. The results showed that the combination of employee feedback, reward, and work freedom explained 84.9% of the variance in effective management. Work freedom was found to be the strongest predictor of effective management ( $\beta = 0.83, p < 0.001$ ), followed by employee feedback ( $\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ), and reward ( $\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$ ). Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are thus supported.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables (N = 132).

No.	Variables	1	2	3	4
1.	Employee feedback	1			
2.	Reward	0.58**	1		
3.	Work freedom	0.49**	0.60**	1	
4.	Effective management	0.52**	0.63**	0.91**	1

Note: \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 3. Predictors of effective management (n = 156).

Criterion variable	Predictor variable	F	R <sup>2</sup>	df	Beta	t	p
Effective management	Employee feedback	284.52**	0.849	(3,152)	0.46	5.39	0.00
	Reward				0.31	3.40	0.00
	Work freedom				0.83	20.4	0.00

Note: \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of employee feedback, reward, and work freedom on the effective management of university professional employees in Malaysia. The findings show that all three independent variables have a positive effect on professional employees' effective management. Work freedom was the best predictor, followed by employee feedback and reward.

This study's findings show that work freedom is the strongest predictor of effective management of professional employees, supporting H1. Our findings support previous research by Chanana (2021) and Patro (2013). Freedom among professional employees in higher education institutions allows individuals to perform their duties diligently. Workplace freedom relieves managers of their burden by reducing interactions with employees; as a result, cases of frustration during supervision are eliminated. As a result, in order to improve performance management in universities, it is critical to give employees the freedom to carry out responsibilities based on their assessment of the situation. Freedom should be allowed in areas such as idea sharing and responsibility execution. Employees should be given opportunities to share their ideas without fear of being humiliated. The freedom allows employees to share ideas while also making suggestions for task execution that improve the management process. The staff learns new approaches to completing tasks within the institutions by exchanging ideas. At the same time, personal relationships between employees are strengthened, which improves coexistence. The management process is improved by creating a conducive environment where sharing of ideas is encouraged, as the individuals in charge are able to focus on other issues arising other than monitoring employee interaction. Furthermore, it is recommended that across institutions, both teaching and non-teaching staff be given autonomy in their preferred modes of task execution. Employees develop a sense of responsibility when management allows them to use efficient methods of carrying out various tasks, such as teaching and student welfare. Employees improve their efficiency and output while carrying out tasks, which has a positive impact on the academic achievement of higher learning institutions. At the same time, the staff gets to put new ideas to the test, which could benefit management by lowering operating costs within the institutions. Personal affairs, including family matters, should also be allowed. The University administration should implement policies and guidelines that encourage the provision of free time

for employees to interact with their families and care for their personal lives without repercussions. Employees can use their freedom to relieve stress and burnout. In exchange, management is able to reduce workplace tensions caused by job dissatisfaction and overworking.

This study's H1 finding was that employee feedback has a positive effect on the effective management of professional university employees in Malaysia. The finding was supported and thus concurred with by [Joughin et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Newman and Ford \(2021\)](#). In the workplace, including higher education institutions, desirable feedback makes employees feel wanted and understood. Employees who are appreciated at work strive to maintain professionalism and formal behaviour in order to maintain their high performance. Employer feedback is an important part of improving employee management at Malaysian universities. Employers should provide constant and frequent feedback to their employees. Giving feedback to teaching and non-teaching staff, for example, would help them improve their performance. Teachers would be able to assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies through constant and frequent feedback. At the same time, lecturers would be able to devise teaching strategies that adhere to the educational institution's policies and guidelines. Furthermore, it is recommended that employees in Malaysian higher education institutions receive a clear explanation of how their performance is measured. This approach would enable both teaching and non-teaching staff to work together to achieve the set deliverables, thereby improving the management process within the institutions. A clear understanding of the mode of performance measurement is critical because it allows for free and fair management of employees without bias. Management at the Malaysian universities should ensure that every decision is supported by sound reasoning. To avoid conflict in the staff management process, the reasons for every decision affecting teaching and non-teaching staff should be thoroughly explained to stakeholders. To create a pleasant working environment, management should cultivate a trusting relationship with its employees. A trusting relationship allows all stakeholders to coexist within learning institutions without conflict, which disables the employee management process.

The second hypothesis in this investigation was that reward systems increase management effectiveness. The finding was supported, and as a result, it concurred with the findings of [Sudiardhita et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Azabo et al. \(2020\)](#). Employees are more productive as a result of the rewarding process because they are motivated to perform to the best of their abilities in order to be compensated, which in turn improves the management process. It is highly advisable to ensure that the existing reward systems are equitable, thereby affording every worker an equal chance to acquire them. The incentive to work harder and accomplish one's objectives within an organisation is strengthened by a fair reward system. When organisations establish transparent goals and incentives for employees, management becomes simpler because most workers are able to concentrate on the work at hand. In addition, both teaching and non-teaching staff members should be provided with a comprehensive explanation of the reward system. The employees are provided with a clear understanding of the avenues for reward after a clear explanation of the rewarding system is given. In educational institutions, some of the most common forms of rewards that can be given out are recognition, monetary awards, and promotions. When choosing a system of rewards, it is important that all relevant parties, including management, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff, be involved in the decision-making process.

## **6. IMPLICATION, LIMITATION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of the research could be implemented in the education sector to enhance professional management in universities located in Malaysia. A lack of professionalism and ineffective management are contributing factors to the high employee turnover rate seen in the education industry. The results of this research indicate that a favorable working environment, one that includes elements such as positive feedback, motivation through rewards, and freedom, has a positive impact on the management process of an organization. When developing the systematic workflow that contributes to the effective management of professional employees in the workplace, it is important to note that theories such as Douglas McGregor's Theory of X and Y are preferred ([Selvanathan, Yan,](#)

Supramaniam, Arumugam, & Suppramaniam, 2019). With the findings of the study, policymakers and other stakeholders in the education sector will be able to develop the necessary guidelines to promote effective management and increased professionalism.

In spite of this, researchers should proceed with caution when attempting to draw conclusions from the findings because the sample size of professional employees from a Malaysian university was relatively low. It's possible that the researcher will extend the scope of the data collection so that it encompasses additional institutions of higher learning. As a consequence of this, policymakers could stand to gain more from a more in-depth study that offers a more comprehensive and illuminating overview of effective management throughout the entirety of Malaysia's higher education sector. When policymakers compare data from a variety of perspectives, they are able to address challenges more effectively.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The research was conducted with the intention of finding a solution to the underlying problem, which revealed that a lack of effective management has a detrimental effect on professionalism within the organization. The research was undertaken with the intention of finding a solution to the underlying problem. We came to the conclusion that an environment that is conducive to work and that has established channels for reward, feedback, and freedom has a greater chance of improving the professionalism of the workforce. This conclusion was reached on the basis of the hypothesis that was tested as well as McGregor's Theory of X and Y. Policymakers should devise methods for ensuring the successful implementation of policies relating to employer feedback, reward systems, and the amount of work freedom employees are allowed to exercise in the educational sector in order to achieve effective management.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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