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LEADING NEW EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS AND IMPACT ON INNOVATION AND WORK SATISFACTION AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The rise of new employment patterns, including hybrid work models, short-term contracts, and performance-based appraisals, is transforming academic labor structures worldwide. In Malaysia, this transition has begun to influence how academic staff engage with their work, particularly in areas of innovation and personal well-being. This mixed-methods study investigates the impact of evolving employment arrangements on innovation performance and work happiness among academic staff in three Malaysian public research universities. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Transformational Leadership Theory, the study integrates survey data from 300 academic staff with qualitative insights from 15 interviews. Findings reveal that while flexibility and autonomy in employment foster innovation and satisfaction, concerns around job security and unclear expectations negatively affect morale and productivity. The study offers practical recommendations for university leaders to redesign employment practices that balance institutional goals with staff well-being.

Keywords: New employment patterns, innovation performance, happiness at work, higher education, Malaysia, educational leadership.



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INTRODUCTION

The academic profession has long been associated with a stable employment structure, characterized by tenured positions, predictable career progression, and clearly defined responsibilities. This traditional model has historically served as a foundation for sustained research productivity, deep institutional loyalty, and consistent pedagogical quality. However, in the past two decades, this paradigm has begun to erode as universities globally confront financial constraints, shifting student demographics, and the accelerating pace of technological change (Altbach & de Wit, 2021). The emergence of new academic capitalism and managerialism has further incentivized higher education institutions to adopt more flexible and cost-effective employment models, often at the expense of long-term job security (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Across regions, institutions have begun restructuring academic roles to include hybrid teaching responsibilities, digital content delivery, part-time adjunct positions, and performance-based evaluations. These changes are visible, especially in developing higher education systems, including Malaysia's public research universities. As noted by Wan et al. (2022), Malaysian universities have increasingly turned to short-term contract appointments and performance-driven key performance indicators (KPIs) to manage budgetary pressures and compete in global university rankings. While these arrangements promise greater institutional flexibility and responsiveness, they simultaneously introduce new challenges related to faculty morale, innovation incentives, and workload management.

At the heart of these shifts lies a critical question: How do evolving employment structures impact the intellectual vitality and psychological well-being of academic staff? While the literature is rich in studies evaluating student engagement, curriculum reform, and institutional branding (Morshidi et al., 2017), relatively little attention has been paid to how these organizational changes affect lecturers themselves. The introduction of precarious roles and variable workloads has been associated with decreased autonomy, role ambiguity, and diminished motivation. These factors are known inhibitors to innovation and satisfaction (Marginson, 2016; Shin & Jung, 2014). This oversight presents a pressing research gap in understanding how academic labour reforms intersect with core academic values such as creativity, collaboration, and scholarly productivity.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring how new employment patterns influence two interrelated outcomes: innovation performance and work happiness. Conducted within the context of three Malaysian public research universities, the research examines how hybrid work, contract-based roles, and KPI-based evaluation systems affect the ability of lecturers to generate novel research and teaching practices, as well as their overall sense of fulfilment and job satisfaction. By focusing on both structural and psychological dimensions of academic work, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how institutional reforms are experienced at the ground level by faculty members.

The study draws on a multi-theoretical framework that includes the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These models collectively enable an integrated analysis of how workplace demands (e.g., job insecurity, role overload) and resources (e.g., autonomy, leadership support) influence staff performance and well-being. By situating the study within both educational management and organizational psychology, the research contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for more humane, equitable, and innovation-driven employment policies in higher education. It also provides practical recommendations for university leaders and HR practitioners aiming to align institutional goals with the well-being and creativity of their academic workforce.



LITERATURE REVIEW

New Employment Patterns in Higher Education

Over the past two decades, employment structures in higher education have undergone a marked transformation globally. In response to declining public funding, rising student enrolment, and neoliberal policy shifts, universities have increasingly adopted alternative employment models such as fixed-term contracts, sessional appointments, and outsourcing of teaching duties (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). These arrangements, although seen as financially pragmatic, have fundamentally altered the nature of academic work by introducing instability and reducing institutional investment in human capital.

In the Malaysian context, the uptake of non-traditional employment patterns has accelerated in public universities, especially following reforms aligned with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025. Universities now increasingly rely on contract-based hiring, short-term project appointments, and hybrid delivery models to meet performance-based KPIs and global ranking expectations (Wan et al., 2022). These models allow institutions to scale resources efficiently, but they also create a segmented workforce in which younger or non-tenured academics face significant insecurity.

Hybrid work models (particularly those introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic) have added further complexity. While remote and flexible work offer greater autonomy and improved work-life integration, they also obscure traditional workplace boundaries and pose challenges for accountability, collegiality, and mentorship (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Academics working remotely may experience isolation, reduced access to leadership, and fewer informal opportunities for collaboration and career advancement.

Moreover, adjunct teaching and part-time roles, while offering institutions flexibility, often marginalize those in these roles from research grants, faculty governance, and promotion opportunities. Research shows that such employment conditions are associated with lower job satisfaction, limited professional development, and reduced academic freedom (Bryson & Barnes, 2000). This erosion of academic citizenship raises concerns about the long-term vitality of the higher education sector.

Taken together, these developments underscore the need for leadership and policy responses that balance institutional flexibility with academic sustainability. While new employment patterns may serve short-term financial goals, they risk undermining the intrinsic motivations, career commitment, and innovation potential of the academic workforce. More inclusive and equitable employment frameworks are essential to ensuring that universities remain not just competitive but also collegial and purpose-driven institutions.

Innovation Performance in Academic Work

Innovation in academia extends beyond scientific breakthroughs to include creative pedagogical practices, interdisciplinary research, digital teaching tools, and institutional entrepreneurship. It is increasingly regarded as a key driver of university reputation, student satisfaction, and national knowledge economies (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). As such, understanding what drives or hinders academic innovation has become a central concern in higher education management.

Research consistently highlights autonomy as a crucial enabler of innovation performance among academic staff. When faculty members are given discretion over their research topics, teaching methods, and collaboration choices, they are more likely to explore novel ideas and challenge disciplinary boundaries (Shin & Cummings, 2014). Autonomy fuels intrinsic motivation, which is positively linked to cognitive flexibility and problem-solving capacity; two key ingredients of innovative performance (Amabile, 1996).

However, institutional factors such as excessive administrative workload, bureaucratic performance audits, and



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rigid KPI systems often suppress innovation. When academic time is consumed by non-core duties or narrowly defined metrics, the space for creativity shrinks. As noted by Bland et al. (2005), institutions that over-emphasize output quantity rather than process quality inadvertently stifle genuine academic discovery and risk promoting mediocrity masked as productivity.

Collaborative networks, both within and across institutions, also play a significant role in fostering innovation. Interdisciplinary research teams and teaching communities of practice facilitate the exchange of diverse perspectives, mentorship, and co-creation of knowledge (Hargadon & Sutton, 1997). Yet, precarious employment and fragmented work schedules hinder the development of such networks, especially for early-career or contract staff.

Therefore, universities must consciously design work environments and leadership cultures that nourish rather than regulate innovation. Policies promoting research autonomy, reducing bureaucratic burden, and recognizing informal innovation should be prioritized. Institutions must also consider the long-term impact of employment structures on the innovation ecosystem, ensuring that the conditions enabling creativity are not reserved only for the privileged few.

Happiness at Work in Academic Settings

Happiness at work has emerged as a significant predictor of both organizational success and individual well-being. In higher education, lecturer happiness influences not only job retention but also teaching quality, student engagement, and collegiality (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). As universities adopt more performance-oriented and fragmented work structures, concerns over academic happiness and well-being have grown among education scholars and leaders alike.

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that workplace happiness is derived from the fulfilment of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In academic environments, these needs are met when staff are given meaningful control over their work, receive feedback and support to improve, and feel socially integrated within their departments or faculties. Disruptions in any of these domains can lead to disengagement, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction.

Empirical studies suggest that job insecurity, lack of recognition, and overwhelming workloads are common stressors among university staff, particularly those on short-term contracts or in adjunct positions (Winefield et al., 2003). These stressors erode psychological well-being and often trigger withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism or disengagement from institutional service. Conversely, environments that emphasize faculty autonomy, professional development, and emotional support tend to enhance both job satisfaction and organizational loyalty.

Leadership is a critical mediating factor in the happiness of academic staff. Transformational leaders who recognize individual contributions, promote open communication, and support work-life integration have been shown to positively influence employee morale and motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In contrast, transactional or authoritarian leadership styles often exacerbate feelings of alienation and stress among staff.

In summary, fostering happiness at work in universities is not a peripheral concern but a central strategic goal. Institutions must invest in leadership development, supportive HR policies, and equitable work distribution to cultivate emotionally sustainable academic cultures. This is particularly urgent in contexts where employment precarity and digital overload are becoming the norm.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates the JD-R model, Self-Determination Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory, illustrating how job demands and resources, intrinsic motivation, and leadership support interdependently influence innovation and well-being, thereby providing a multidimensional perspective that explains both structural



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and psychological aspects of academic work in the Malaysian higher education context. To examine the impact of new employment patterns on innovation performance and happiness at work, this study is anchored in a multi-theoretical framework integrating the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Transformational Leadership Theory. The JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) is widely applied in organizational psychology to understand how the interplay between job demands (e.g., workload, ambiguity, job insecurity) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback, social support) influences employee well-being and performance outcomes. In academic settings, new employment models often elevate demands (such as increased workload, unstable contracts, or performance pressure) while simultaneously reducing critical resources like tenure security or research autonomy. According to the JD-R framework, such imbalances can result in emotional exhaustion, diminished motivation, and lower innovation capacity, especially if protective factors are not in place.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) complements the JD-R model by providing a deeper understanding of intrinsic motivation in workplace behaviour. Developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT posits that individuals thrive when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. In the context of academia, these needs manifest through control over one’s teaching and research agenda (autonomy), opportunities for skill development (competence), and collegial relationships (relatedness). New employment arrangements, particularly those that limit role clarity or hinder long-term planning, can disrupt these psychological needs. Studies have shown that when academics perceive restrictions on their autonomy or feel undervalued, their motivation to innovate or contribute meaningfully to institutional goals declines significantly (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Lastly, Transformational Leadership Theory offers a lens to explore how institutional leaders can mediate the impact of employment changes on staff experiences. As articulated by Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders go beyond transactional exchanges by providing individualized support, articulating a shared vision, and intellectually stimulating their followers. In higher education, department heads or deans who demonstrate transformational qualities can inspire trust, buffer the stress of job insecurity, and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation even amidst structural uncertainty. Leadership thus acts as a critical moderating factor, amplifying the positive effects of job resources while mitigating the negative consequences of job demands. By integrating these three theoretical models, this study offers a robust analytical framework to investigate how employment structures, psychological needs, and leadership styles collectively shape academic innovation and well-being.

As an overview, Figure 1 presents the underlying theories for this study.

Figure 1
Theoretical Foundations for The Study

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model:	Self-Determination Theory (SDT):	Transformational Leadership Theory:
Balances between demands (e.g., workload, job insecurity) and resources (e.g., autonomy, supervisor support) affect staff well-being and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).	Emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation driven by autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).	Suggests that leadership practices such as individualized support and intellectual stimulation foster positive staff outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006).



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METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to comprehensively examine how new employment patterns influence both innovation performance and work happiness among academic staff in Malaysian public research universities. This approach integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a single phase, allowing for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon. The quantitative strand was designed to identify generalizable trends across a broad sample of academic staff, utilizing structured survey instruments that measured employment structures, innovation outputs, and well-being indicators. Meanwhile, the qualitative strand was strategically embedded to uncover rich, contextualized insights into how these employment patterns are experienced and interpreted by staff across disciplines and roles.

The rationale for choosing a convergent design lies in its ability to triangulate findings (aligning numerical data with narrative explanations) to enhance the validity and applicability of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By integrating numerical trends with lived experiences, the design supports both generalization and interpretation, which is critical in higher education research where staff perceptions often intersect with institutional policies and leadership culture. This methodological pluralism also acknowledges the multidimensional nature of academic work and responds to calls for more robust and nuanced inquiry into employment-related challenges in academia.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study is academic staff from three Malaysian public research universities, selected per their active engagement in national education reforms and international benchmarking processes. These universities were chosen for their comparability in terms of governance structure, performance-based evaluation systems, and faculty diversity. A total of 300 academic staff members were qualified and participated in the quantitative survey. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling, where strata were defined by faculty discipline (e.g., Education, Science, Medicine, and Engineering) and academic rank (e.g., lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and professor). This method ensured adequate representation across academic hierarchies and knowledge domains, allowing for more balanced statistical analysis.

For the qualitative component, 15 academic staff were selected through purposive sampling to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions. Participants were chosen based on variation in employment type (contract, permanent, adjunct), years of service, and teaching-research load. This criterion-based selection allowed the researchers to explore how new employment arrangements impact different academic roles and career stages. The sample included lecturers from both research-intensive and teaching-focused departments to account for differences in performance expectations and work culture. Efforts were made to ensure gender and ethnic diversity to reflect the broader demographics of Malaysian academia.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative Survey. The survey instrument was developed to capture three main constructs: (1) employment pattern (type and work mode), (2) perceived innovation performance, and (3) happiness at work. The innovation performance scale was adapted from the well-established instrument by Zhou and George (2001), which assesses creative work behaviour and initiative in academic roles. Items included statements like “I often find novel solutions to research or teaching challenges,” rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The happiness or job satisfaction component was measured using a modified version of the Warr (1990) Job Satisfaction Scale, which has been widely validated in occupational psychology and educational contexts.

Demographic variables such as academic rank, faculty, employment status, and work mode (e.g., hybrid, remote, or on-site) were also included. Before full deployment, the instrument underwent pilot testing with 20 respondents



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and was revised based on feedback related to item clarity, response burden, and contextual appropriateness.

Qualitative Interviews. The qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which provided the flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring consistency across participants. The interview protocol included open-ended questions covering areas such as work engagement, leadership support, creativity in teaching and research, emotional well-being, and perceptions of institutional policy. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in English or Bahasa Malaysia, depending on the participant's preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to protect confidentiality. Field notes were maintained to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details.

Eventually, the qualitative analysis achieved thematic saturation through iterative coding across 15 interviews, with triangulation ensured by peer debriefing and cross-checking against survey findings, while the quantitative analysis confirmed construct validity using Cronbach's alpha and model fit indices, thereby ensuring methodological rigor and credibility in capturing the complex dynamics of employment patterns.

FINDINGS

Employment Patterns Observed

The analysis of survey data revealed diverse employment structures among academic staff across the three participating Malaysian public universities. Approximately 42% of the respondents reported being engaged on contract-based terms, reflecting the growing trend of performance-linked and renewable short-term appointments in public higher education. An additional 28% identified as adjunct or part-time lecturers, many of whom were responsible for specialized course delivery or industry-linked modules. The remaining 30% were permanent or tenured faculty, often occupying senior academic ranks or research leadership positions. These distributions underscore the increasing reliance on non-permanent academic labour within the Malaysian higher education system, echoing broader global trends of precarious academic employment (Bryson & Barnes, 2000).

In terms of work arrangements, 65% of the participants reported working in hybrid or blended teaching models, which combine face-to-face instruction with online platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, or Zoom. Hybrid work was particularly prevalent in faculties such as Engineering, Science, and ICT, where the digitalization of instructional content had already been underway pre-pandemic. In contrast, faculties rooted in clinical training or arts-based pedagogy reported a slightly higher incidence of on-site or fully physical work arrangements. Qualitative interviews supported these findings, revealing that younger academics and early-career staff were more frequently assigned hybrid or remote tasks, often with limited institutional guidance or mentorship. These employment and work mode variations were not uniformly distributed but instead showed faculty-level differentiation based on pedagogical norms, infrastructure, and digital readiness. For example, staff in science and technology faculties expressed more familiarity and comfort with virtual tools, while education faculty emphasized the relational challenges posed by reduced physical interaction with students. These distinctions point to the contextual nature of employment experiences and the importance of localized leadership in managing staff expectations and workloads.

Impact on Innovation Performance

Quantitative results indicated that autonomy was a significant positive predictor of perceived innovation performance among academic staff ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). Respondents who reported having greater freedom in designing course content, selecting research topics, or managing their work schedules were more likely to engage in innovative teaching strategies and pursue interdisciplinary collaborations. Autonomy appeared to stimulate intrinsic motivation, supporting the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory that creative behaviour thrives under self-directed conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, job insecurity, particularly among contract-based staff, was found to be a negative predictor of innovation ($\beta = -.29, p < .01$), suggesting that uncertainty about future employment diminishes risk-taking and creative exploration.



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Qualitative interviews provided nuanced insights into these dynamics. Several respondents shared that administrative pressures and unclear job expectations often discouraged them from experimenting with non-traditional pedagogical methods. One lecturer noted:

I wanted to introduce a hybrid classroom model, but I was worried it would be seen as risky or wasteful of student time, especially since my contract was up for renewal.

Others emphasized the role of peer support and departmental culture in enabling innovation. Those working under leaders who fostered psychological safety and collaborative problem-solving were more inclined to attempt novel approaches in both research and teaching.

The findings highlight that structural autonomy alone is insufficient. Innovation flourishes only when paired with institutional and leadership support. Even in hybrid environments, if staff perceive that their innovative efforts are not valued or supported, the likelihood of sustained creative engagement diminishes. Thus, university policies promoting innovation must also address the contextual pressures (contract length, workload, evaluative mechanisms) that shape staff behaviour.

Impact on Happiness at Work

Workplace happiness, operationalized through job satisfaction and emotional well-being indicators, was found to be closely associated with leadership support and perceived fairness in workload distribution. Regression results showed that leadership support had a strong positive relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), while fairness in workload was also positively associated ($\beta = .34, p < .01$). These findings validate previous studies emphasizing the importance of transparent communication, equitable task allocation, and meaningful feedback in shaping employee morale (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Winefield et al., 2003).

Interview data reinforced this relationship. Staff who described their departmental leaders as empathetic, responsive, and available reported greater satisfaction, even when operating under hybrid or contract-based conditions. In contrast, dissatisfaction was most pronounced among staff who faced ambiguous role expectations, inconsistent communication from management, and exclusion from departmental decision-making. One senior lecturer shared:

I rarely get updates about policy changes. I just wait for emails. It feels like I'm not part of the team.

Another commented, while their workload was technically similar to that of permanent staff, they had fewer resources and little recognition, which contributed to feelings of demotivation and emotional fatigue.

The emotional toll of precarious academic employment was also evident in references to anxiety, burnout, and career stagnation. Several participants indicated that the lack of clear career progression pathways affected their sense of purpose and belonging. However, some also noted that even in temporary roles, strong mentorship and fair treatment could buffer negative emotions. These findings suggest that while employment type does influence happiness, institutional culture and leadership behaviour may exert even greater influence in shaping staff perceptions of well-being and inclusion.

Moderating Role of Leadership

The findings across both quantitative and qualitative strands showcase leadership style as a critical moderating variable in the relationship between employment patterns and staff outcomes. Transformational leadership (characterized by vision articulation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation) was consistently linked to higher innovation and satisfaction across employment types. Interviewees who described their department heads or deans as encouraging, proactive, and supportive tended to report more positive experiences, regardless of whether they were permanent, contract-based, or adjunct staff.



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Specifically, participants praised leaders who held regular check-ins, encouraged experimentation, provided constructive feedback, and ensured that part-time staff were included in academic discussions. In contrast, hierarchical or transactional leadership styles were associated with feelings of alienation and professional stagnation. One senior lecturer observed, “Our dean treats us like partners. Even when I raised concerns about workload, she listened and adjusted expectations. That makes all the difference.”

These leadership effects were also visible in the quantitative results, where perceived leadership support moderated the relationship between employment insecurity and innovation engagement. In departments with low leadership support, contract-based staff reported significantly lower innovation performance compared to those in similar positions but with high leadership backing. This moderating effect underscores the importance of contextual leadership practices in enabling staff to perform well under changing employment structures. As such, leadership development initiatives should prioritize transformational practices as strategic tools for sustaining staff morale and productivity amid organizational reforms.

DISCUSSION

The findings affirm the dual-edged nature of new employment patterns. While flexibility and digitalization can empower staff, instability and poor management structures can reduce trust and engagement. These results echo global findings on academic precarity and innovation (Marginson, 2016; Shin & Cummings, 2014). Leadership emerges as a critical buffer in managing employment transitions. Transformational practices can amplify the benefits of flexible roles while mitigating the psychological burden of job insecurity. University HR policies should therefore include leadership training, mentorship schemes, and clearer employment trajectories. As contributions to knowledge, by situating Malaysian findings alongside similar studies in ASEAN and the Global South, this study emphasizes shared challenges of academic precarity, workload intensification, and leadership responses, thereby positioning the research as both contextually grounded and internationally relevant to higher education reforms in comparable developing systems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides meaningful insights into how evolving employment patterns within Malaysian public universities impact two vital domains of academic life: innovation performance and happiness at work. As higher education institutions respond to shifting financial models, global rankings, and digital transformation, the adoption of new employment models (ranging from contract-based hiring to hybrid teaching arrangements) has become increasingly prevalent. While such models offer flexibility, cost-efficiency, and responsiveness, they also introduce a set of complex challenges that influence staff motivation, well-being, and creativity. The findings from this mixed-methods study reveal that autonomy, institutional support, and leadership engagement are key enablers of positive staff outcomes, while job insecurity, role ambiguity, and inconsistent leadership can hinder innovation and morale.

A key conclusion drawn from this research is that new employment patterns alone do not determine academic success or satisfaction. Rather, it is the institutional ecosystem surrounding those patterns that matters. The presence of transformational leadership, clear expectations, opportunities for professional development, and an inclusive departmental culture are all critical factors in offsetting the potential negative effects of job precarity. For example, even contract-based staff showed high levels of innovation when they felt empowered and supported by their department heads. This underscores the need to view employment reforms not merely as structural or administrative issues, but as deeply human ones, tied to identity, belonging, and purpose within the academic community.

To optimize the benefits of flexible employment while minimizing its drawbacks, this study proposes several practical recommendations. First, universities should implement structured hybrid work guidelines that establish expectations, support systems, and evaluation criteria for remote and blended teaching. This ensures that flexibility



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does not become fragmentation. Second, institutions should establish targeted innovation grants and incentives for contract and adjunct lecturers, recognizing their potential to contribute fresh ideas despite limited job stability. These grants can be designed to support small-scale teaching innovations, community engagement, or pilot research projects.

Third, universities should invest in comprehensive psychological support systems, including counselling services, mental health workshops, and resilience training, particularly for early-career or temporary academic staff. Professional development programs should be embedded into institutional routines and made accessible across employment categories. Fourth, leadership training should emphasize transformational and inclusive approaches. Department heads and deans must be equipped not only to manage performance metrics but also to build trust, nurture talent, and lead with empathy in increasingly complex academic settings.

Finally, this study recommends that future research adopt a longitudinal approach to better understand the evolving impacts of employment reforms over time. It would be valuable to track staff experiences across different stages of employment, academic ranks, and institutional types. Comparative studies between public and private universities, or between different countries in the ASEAN region, could also shed light on contextual differences in employment governance and academic culture. Such research would contribute to the ongoing development of sustainable, human-centred employment models in higher education.

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