

# A theory of planned behaviour: perspective on rehiring ex-offenders

Rehiring  
ex-offenders

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Fatin Nadirah Khasni, J.S. Keshminder and Soo Cheng Chuah

*Department of Economics and Financial Studies,  
Faculty of Business and Management,  
Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Selangor,  
Kampus Puncak Alam, Malaysia, and*

T. Ramayah

*School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Minden, Malaysia;*

*Daffodil International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh;*

*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS),  
Kota Samarahan, Malaysia;*

*Pusat Kajian Penciptaan Nilai dan Kesejahteraan Insan (INSAN),*

*Fakulti Ekonomi dan Pengurusan (FEP), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM),  
Bangi, Malaysia;*

*Department of Management, Sunway University Business School (SUBS),  
Bandar Sunway, Malaysia and*

*Faculty of Accounting and Management, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR),  
Kajang, Malaysia*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Using the theory of Planned Behaviour as the basis, the study investigates the impact of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control on rehiring intention. The predictors of attitude (i.e. organisational culture, risk and government incentives) and perceived behavioural control (i.e. skills and supporting documents) were examined by expanding the TPB model.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A self-administered survey was used to gather data from Malaysian firms hiring ex-offenders. Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to verify the study's proposed research model's hypothesis.

**Findings** – The SEM analysis showed attitude and subjective norm as solid predictors of rehiring intention. For attitude, organisational culture and government incentives were proven to have an impact. Besides perceived behavioural control, the skill set was a significant predictor.

**Practical implications** – This study suggests that active involvement of the government to engage employers with ex-offenders through incentives (tax deductions and wage and training subsidies) and prison job fairs can increase their employment opportunities. There is also a need for formal guidelines and practices on hiring ex-offenders in organisations to promote a positive hiring culture. Establishing an employment-based re-entry unit that provides ex-offenders with various transition skill programs, such as technical skills, job search skills and life skills, is crucial for their employment prospects.

**Originality/value** – This study is among the pioneers in investigating ex-offenders' rehiring agenda, specifically examining factors that influence employers' decision making. The results are relevant to managers, regulators, institutions and NGOs to structure the right interventions to ensure ex-offenders are successfully hired. It is found that Interventions aiming to increase job opportunities for ex-offenders require activities that



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expand community and ex-offender engagement since it reduces the social stigma and promotes more ex-offenders accepting behaviour.

**Keywords** Employability, PLS-SEM, Theory of planned behaviour, Hiring decisions, Ex-offenders

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Reintegrating ex-offenders [1] into the labour market and community is of great public concern, yet challenges persist since they are often forced to seek employment while confronting the stigma of their criminal records and history of imprisonment (Brown, 2011; Burt, 2010; Flatt and Jacobs, 2018; Routh and Hamilton, 2015). Social stigma is a major impediment to securing employment among ex-offenders (Jung, 2015), leading to prolonged unemployment and exposing them to a higher risk of re-arrest (Siwach, 2018). Having a career is essential to preventing recidivism among ex-offenders (Berg and Huebner, 2011) and ensuring their long-term success (Berg and Huebner, 2011; Duwe and Clark, 2017).

Although various policies, such as Ban the Box [2], have been introduced to encourage organisations to make impartial recruitment decisions in their hiring process (Anazodo *et al.*, 2019), the number of ex-offenders deprived of employment opportunities still gives grounds for concern (Goodstein, 2019). The criminal background checks conducted by organisations frequently hinder ex-offenders from securing work (Lageson *et al.*, 2015; Pager, 2003, 2008). Schmitt and Warner (2011) estimated that almost 60% of organisations stated they were unwilling to employ ex-offenders. The stigma towards ex-offenders may lead organisations to exercise a blanket policy, imposing a total ban on hiring ex-offenders (Simonson, 2006). Moreover, a lack of job opportunities increases recidivism (Petersilia, 2003; Rossman, 2003; Zweig *et al.*, 2011).

A review of past studies on the stigma facing ex-offenders reveals various reasons why organisations have stigmatised ex-offenders. First and foremost, the label “ex-offender” itself sounds threatening (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010), portraying ex-offenders as dangerous, untrustworthy, unreliable and dishonest (Brewer, 2017; Gaubatz, 1995; Young, 1999), as well as making conventional society liable to disown them. Next, hiring such individuals is considered a major risk by organisations as the ex-offender would represent the organisation’s image and pose a possible risk to the current employees and productivity (Jung, 2015), not to mention their potential to commit further crimes (Leverentz, 2011). Third, ex-offenders are often regarded as not being job-ready due to their lack of education (Jung, 2015; Rukus *et al.*, 2016; D’alessio *et al.*, 2015; Visher *et al.*, 2008) and employable skills (Pager, 2003; Boateng, 2017; Vacca, 2004; Zakaria *et al.*, 2018). To address these deficiencies, they require retraining (Jung, 2015). Fourth, they are portrayed as having insufficient work experience (Shinkfield *et al.*, 2004; Williams, 2007). Lastly, ex-offenders might suffer from mental health problems, so they might require long-term workplace support (Loosemore *et al.*, 2020).

Notwithstanding the rejection of ex-offenders by many organisations, some employers hire them but on a short-term basis (Flatt and Jacobs, 2018). Research shows that some ex-offenders have demonstrated a sound work ethic, changing the organisation’s perception of them and increasing the company’s willingness to hire them despite their criminal history (Anazodo *et al.*, 2019). The Society for Human Resource Management and Charles Koch Institute (2018) reported that 82% of managers and 67% of Human Resource professionals view employees with a criminal history as quality hires compared to individuals without a criminal background.

In Malaysia’s case, around 11,000 prisoners are released annually from prison (Malaysian Prisons Department, 2017). In 2017, only 2,201 ex-offenders successfully secured a job (Hian, 2018), whereas the majority of ex-offenders remained jobless. The hiring of ex-offenders came to

prominence when the government proposed an incentive in the 2019 Budget to offer additional tax cuts to employers who hired ex-offenders (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2018). Ex-offenders lauded this incentive to provide an impetus for employers to hire them (Bernama, 2018a). For the government to implement further initiatives and for corporations to actively hire ex-offenders, it is essential to understand the present hiring scenario and determine hiring managers' perceptions of rehiring [3] ex-offenders. Past studies on ex-offenders have investigated various employability-related issues, from barriers to their employment (Hidayat and Zakaria, 2018; Quarton, 2020) to the hiring of ex-offenders (Denver, 2020; Holloway and Wiener, 2020; Wiafe, 2021). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no single study has investigated hiring managers' perceptions of rehiring ex-offenders.

The perspectives of hiring managers who have previously hired ex-offenders provide valuable insights for policy planning. It is more likely that organisations will hire ex-offenders after exposure to them (Obatusin and Ritter-Williams, 2019; Young and Powell, 2015). Through such interactions, organisations exhibit less prejudice towards hiring ex-offenders (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010). Active interaction with ex-offenders reduces an organisation's tendency to experience the fear that ex-offenders will commit further crime (Giguere and Dundes, 2002). Hiring managers who have previously engaged with ex-offenders are more likely to exhibit compassion towards them during the hiring process (Atkin and Armstrong, 2013).

This research primarily focuses on rehiring intention among hiring managers. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was employed to illustrate the factors that can impact the hiring managers' intention to rehire ex-offenders in Malaysia. The TPB can be applied to people with a limited ability to use their willpower or who face situations in which they have little control over their actions (Ajzen, 1985, 2002). The TPB model has been credited for its effective capacity to determine a manager's behavioural intention. It serves as a rigorous baseline theory/model with which to conceptualise predictors of hiring decisions (Ang *et al.*, 2015). Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to verify the hypothesis of the proposed research model. Few researchers have used the Theory of Planned Behaviour to investigate this issue from a human resources perspective. This paper aims to initiate further research on the issue of employing ex-offender. The current findings are crucial to designing successful public and organisational policies that can help to mitigate the employment issues experienced by ex-offenders.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the prison and recidivism data in Malaysia. Section 3 offers the trajectory of the TPB in relation to ex-offenders. Section 4 focuses on the hypothesis development, which is followed by the study design (Section 5) and the PLS data analysis and results (Section 6). Finally, the paper ends with a discussion, the implications of the study and concluding remarks.

### Malaysian prison population and recidivism scenario

Malaysia's prison population is rising, with 2018 recording a historical high of 59,278 prisoners. The Malaysian Prison Department targets a recidivism rate that does not exceed 8% of the total number of prisoners. In the context of criminal justice, recidivism is described as a person's constant repetition of a crime despite receiving constant warnings and corrective action (Bartley, 2010) (Warren, 2007). Recidivism is often measured two to three years after an offender has been released. According to a Malaysian Prison Department Annual Report, the number of recidivist offenders rose from 7.33% in 2010 to 9.03% in 2017 (see Table 1) (Malaysian Prisons Department, 2017).

Acknowledging that an inability to secure employment is a cause of the high recidivism rate, the government has introduced various initiatives. Among these are tax deductions for companies hiring ex-prisoners, funding for prison training programs and moral support. One

**Table 1.**  
Statistics of recidivist  
convicts admitted in  
Malaysia

Year	Number of prisoners released after 3 Years	Number of recidivists	
		Total	Percentage (%)
2010	75,397	5,524	7.33
2011	76,699	6,033	7.87
2012	81,862	6,524	7.97
2013	88,883	6,769	7.61
2014	94,495	7,619	8.06
2015	102,214	8,897	8.70
2016	50,747	4,359	8.59
2017	51,646	4,666	9.03

**Note(s):** Number of prisoners released after 3 years = cumulative number of prisoners released for three years. For example, the value for 2011 is cumulative for years 2009, 2010 and 2011

**Source(s):** Annual Review [Malaysian Prison Department \(2017\)](#)

initiative that has gained momentum is the Corporate Smart Internship (CSI) program. This program assists parolees and those under the Licensed Release of Prisoners Program (PBSL) to obtain workplace training and skills. The companies involved come from various industries and more than 200 have participated in the CSI program since it started in 2016 ([Bernama, 2021b](#)). As of October 2021, the program had attracted 10,446 parolees and 1,284 PBSL participants ([Bernama, 2021b](#)).

### The trajectory of the TPB in relation to ex-offenders

The TPB is a widely used model with which to understand managers' attitudes, intentions and behaviours ([Ajzen, 1991, 2011](#)). The TPB is an advancement on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) ([Fishbein and Ajzen, 1976, 1977](#)). It addresses the shortcomings of the TRA, which failed to rationalise behaviours that are neither wholly voluntary nor controlled ([Ajzen, 1991](#)). The TPB helps to develop a social psychological model of human behaviour by linking beliefs to behaviours. [Ajzen \(1991\)](#) argued that people are generally rational in their selection, make systematic use of the accessible information and consider the consequences of their actions before deciding to either perform or not perform a given behaviour. The theory postulates that the best way to assess this behaviour is to measure behavioural intention. In the TPB, three independent variables—attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control—influence behavioural intention. As a general rule, when an individual exhibits a positive attitude, subjective norm and greater perceived behavioural control over a particular action, the intention to execute the behaviour grows.

The rationale for using the TPB was twofold. First, published literature has qualitatively gauged the factors that influence employers' decisions to hire ex-offenders; however, no supporting theoretical model or empirical data is available to investigate these exploratory findings further. A rigorous baseline theory/model is needed to conceptualise the hiring decision factors. The TPB offers the best fit since it is comprehensive and has been used by scholars to examine hiring intentions for marginalised groups ([Ang et al., 2015](#)).

Next, only recently did the Malaysian government openly encourage firms to hire ex-offenders. No factual data exists on the hiring pattern for ex-offenders and, if firms have indeed been hiring ex-offenders, their underlying reasons remain unknown. Hiring managers tend to have a specific perception of marginalised groups, which may evoke negative attitudes towards ex-offenders. There is a high probability for personal deficiencies and external obstacles ([Ajzen, 1985](#)) to influence hiring managers' decisions (i.e. perceived behavioural control). The TPB allows for a better understanding of the association between perceived behavioural control and behavioural intention.

## Hypothesis development

### Rehiring intention

Intention is the disposition towards behaviour and appears in the form of a person's real action once the perfect timing and opportunity arise (Ajzen, 2011; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977). In this study, rehiring intention reflects the definition of repurchase intention—a genuine act of an individual who is satisfied with a product or service and intends to repurchase it (Ibzan *et al.*, 2016). Thus, rehiring intention refers to a hiring manager who is satisfied with the hiring of an ex-offender and intends to hire ex-offenders again. Rehiring intention reflects hiring managers' experiences with ex-offenders. It is based on hiring managers' overall satisfaction (Wu and Chang, 2007) with ex-offenders' work performance and means that such managers perceive that hiring ex-offenders poses a lower risk (Hume and Mort, 2010).

Organisations that have encountered ex-offenders are more inclined to rehire them and they have expressed a higher level of satisfaction and reassurance after working with such individuals. Therefore, many hiring managers exhibit a preference for hiring ex-offenders with some work experience (Denver *et al.*, 2017) and a minimal criminal record (Vuolo *et al.*, 2017) because they work better. Rehiring intention also reflects the loyalty (Amin, 2016) and commitment (Tabrani *et al.*, 2018) shown by ex-offenders, signalling their embrace of ethical work practices. Hiring managers are more willing to hire ex-offenders once they become convinced of their "redeemability" (Reich, 2017)—their capability to change and abstain from criminal behaviour (Maruna and King, 2009). Figure 1 illustrates the study's research model. The model encapsulates three sub-models, as explained in the subsequent section.

### Sub-model 1

Attitude refers to a person's beliefs regarding the various consequences they might experience after performing a specific behaviour. Cheng *et al.* (2006) stated that before an individual commits to a particular behaviour, they tend to assess the advantages and costs of this behaviour. Once an individual is confident that their attitude would contribute to a positive outcome, there is a higher possibility that they would enact the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Cheng *et al.*, 2006; Han *et al.*, 2010). Attitude drives intention, which, in return, predicts behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Kim and Hunter, 1993).

Hiring managers' unfavourable attitudes towards ex-offenders are demand-side employment barriers for an ex-offender (Atkin and Armstrong, 2013; Holzer *et al.*, 2003).

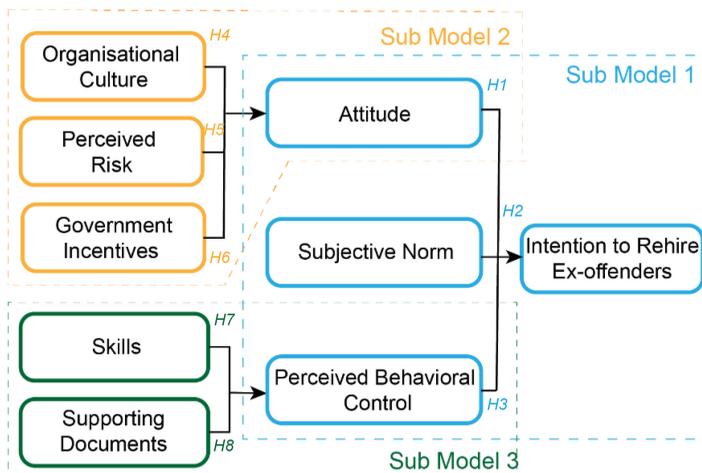


Figure 1.  
Research model

Hiring managers' attitudes play a vital role in the hiring of individuals with psychiatric illness or a criminal background (Varghese *et al.*, 2010). Thus, if hiring managers display a favourable attitude (Fraser *et al.*, 2011) to ex-offenders, this strengthens the rehiring intention to hire such individuals for the organisation. If unfavourable, the rehiring intention is weaker. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesised that:

*H1.* Hiring managers' attitude positively influences the intention to rehire ex-offenders.

Subjective norm is characterised as "the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour" in question (Ajzen, 1991). Social pressure stems from one's significant others (i.e. their social circle), like family members, close friends, colleagues and business partners (Ajzen, 2002). The perceived preferences of such close individuals dictate the motivation to communicate a particular behaviour. A hiring manager will be more inclined to rehire ex-offenders when they believe that this action is socially desirable behaviour and positively perceived within the hiring manager's social circle (Ang *et al.*, 2015). Investigating the social acceptance of ex-offenders, a study by the Society for Human Resource Management and Charles Koch Institute (2018) found that 55% of managers, 51% of non-managers and 47% of HR professionals were willing to hire ex-offenders. Meanwhile, hiring managers' willingness to rehire ex-offenders reduced when their referees believed that ex-offenders were "risky hires". Hence, it is hypothesised that:

*H2.* Strength of subjective norms for hiring ex-offenders positively influence the intention to rehire ex-offenders.

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of executing a specific behaviour. The perceived ease or difficulty exhibited is influenced by experience and future expected obstacles (Ajzen, 1991). PBC is more substantial when one has greater control over the dynamics required to handle a particular event (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011; Han *et al.*, 2010). For hiring managers, having total control over the hiring process allows them to rehire ex-offenders when the opportunity arises (Ajzen, 2002).

However, hiring ex-offenders can be a complex process since managers face pressure to recruit a suitable candidate (Dwoskin *et al.*, 2013). Hiring managers are disadvantaged because of the lack of formal policies guiding the ex-offender hiring process (Lageson *et al.*, 2015). Hiring managers are often unaware of their company's point-of-view on and practices for hiring ex-offenders. Thus, hiring managers may be taking a chance when hiring an ex-offender. A poor selection would have severe repercussions, such as financial losses and the deterioration of the organisation's image (Jung, 2015).

To minimise risk, hiring managers often conduct background checks (Lam and Harcourt, 2003; Petersen, 2016) and investigate thoroughly the type of offence committed by a candidate (Vuolo *et al.*, 2017), leading to a layered hiring process. Therefore, hiring managers may work with certain individuals from within the organisation to gather information and collaborate on decision making. Thus, when the hiring manager lacks complete control over rehiring decisions, rehiring intention decreases. In such cases, even if the attitude and subjective norm favour hiring ex-offenders, PBC will be lower (Han *et al.*, 2010). Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesised that:

*H3.* Hiring managers' perceived behavioural control positively influences the intention to rehire ex-offenders.

#### *Sub-model 2*

Over time, behavioural belief is prone to change due to new knowledge and circumstances (Ajzen, 1985). It is necessary to gauge the antecedents shaping an employer's attitude because, based on these antecedents, the employer will make a favourable or unfavourable

assessment of the behaviour in question. Therefore, while examining the direct relationship between attitude and the employer's intention to rehire ex-offenders, the current study engages with three additional variables—organisational culture, perceived risk and government incentives—to observe the influence of predictors on shaping hiring managers' attitudes. [Abdullah \(2001\)](#) observed that Malaysians are usually viewed as kind, generous and considerate, as well as having strongly humane attitudes towards the less fortunate. Since 2012, the Malaysian government and various local NGOs have spearheaded various programs to break the stigma against ex-offenders and encourage companies to hire them. These programs include community engagement ([Ramli, 2015](#)), internships for ex-offenders ([Malaysian Prisons Department, 2019](#)), tax deductions for organisations hiring ex-offenders ([Bernama, 2018b](#)) and other recruitment incentives. The most recent government announcement is the suggestion to abolish the requirement to state an existing criminal record on a job application ([Bernama, 2021a](#)). Institutional Theory emphasises the relevance of external factors in shaping organisational actions, commonly through cultural understanding and shared expectations. Organisations do not operate in a vacuum. They conform to cultural differences, conventions, norms and demands by many economic agents, assimilating these aspects into their culture ([Dimaggio and Powell, 1983](#); [Meyer and Rowan, 1977](#); [Zucker, 1977](#)).

[Deshpande and Webster \(1989\)](#) defined organisational culture as a “set of shared assumptions and understanding about organization functioning”. The theoretical argument is that culture is a complex system of norms and values formed over time ([Schein, 1992](#)). It is commonly understood as the social bond that keeps organisational members together and expresses members' values, social ideals and beliefs ([Ke and Wei, 2008](#)). Organisational culture, through its values and operating beliefs, strongly influences how its employees perceive events ([Denison and Mishra, 1995](#)) and how they behave ([Schein, 1992](#)).

A supportive organisational culture exhibits a favourable attitude towards ex-offenders as job applicants ([Anazodo et al., 2019](#)). Organisations that are committed to providing job opportunities for ex-offenders develop hiring policies that forbid discrimination against ex-offenders based on the use of criminal records ([Demuijnck, 2009](#); [Goodstein, 2019](#)). Overall, a corporate culture that shows compassion to marginalised groups develops a progressive attitude towards rehiring ex-offenders. In comparison, an organisational culture that shuns marginalised groups tends to display an unfavourable attitude towards rehiring such individuals. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesised that:

*H4. Supportive organisational culture positively influences hiring managers' attitudes toward rehiring ex-offenders.*

Perceived risk is the next factor that may predict the hiring manager's attitude to rehiring ex-offenders. Perceived risk is an expectation of a possible potential loss ([Becker and Knudsen, 2005](#); [Quintal et al., 2010](#)). The self-control theory posits that individuals with low levels of self-control are at high risk of committing crimes and less likely to become employed ([Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990](#)). Organisations are frequently sceptical about ex-offenders because it is challenging to verify in advance that an ex-offender will not create any issue in the organisation after they are hired ([Tonowski, 2015](#)). Before being hired, ex-offenders often lack the information they need to comply with an organisation's legal and moral standards ([Lam and Harcourt, 2003](#)). If hired, it takes time for ex-offenders to adjust to the organisation's culture and surroundings ([Visher and Travis, 2003](#)). Besides, organisations are also at risk when hiring ex-offenders as they may suffer from physical and mental problems like physical or mental illness, health problems due to substance abuse and addiction, behavioural impairment and depression ([Dwyer, 2013](#)). There is a possibility that they would not be able to adapt to the work environment. Thus, organisations are often concerned that ex-offenders might re-offend against them ([Conalty and Cox, 1999](#); [Helfgott, 1997](#)).

If ex-offenders re-offend or exhibit poor work ethics (e.g. absenteeism or poor work performance), this is a significant issue for the organisation and its other employees. Crime and unacceptable work ethics in the workplace may result in declining productivity and customer numbers (Giguere and Dundes, 2002), financial losses and a tarnished corporate image (Jung, 2015). If the crime committed is life-threatening, other employees working with the ex-offender may risk their lives being endangered (Fahey *et al.*, 2006; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008) or suffer psychological effects. Despite the prevalence of perceived risk, if ex-offenders exhibit confidence and are no longer exposed to risk, or they have been rehabilitated, hiring managers may be willing to accept the risk (Griffith and Young, 2017). However, a hostile attitude is always displayed towards any situation in which potential risk is involved (Lobb *et al.*, 2007). Generally, if rehiring an ex-offender later leads to potential losses, the hiring manager will exhibit a negative attitude towards hiring ex-offenders in future. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesised that:

*H5.* Perceived risk negatively influences hiring managers' attitudes toward rehiring ex-offenders.

The government's mission to inculcate among organisations the desired behaviour to hire ex-offenders materialised by providing incentives for organisations once they have hired ex-offenders. Theories on the consequences of incentives posit that incentives stimulate desired behaviours (Lazear and Shaw, 2007). The signalling theory and legitimisation thesis, according to Garfinkel (1956), suggests that employers perceive government incentives as a strong indicator that hiring ex-offenders can be normalised.

Since 2018, the Malaysian government has incentivised organisations to provide employment opportunities to ex-offenders through the annual national budget. These incentives include tax deductions and wage subsidies for organisations that hire ex-offenders. Moreover, training subsidies are given to organisations that train ex-offenders, among others (see Table 2).

Government interventions such as tax incentives may persuade organisations to consider individuals with criminal records in the early stage of the hiring process (Saba, 2019). Incentives alleviate the stigma towards ex-offenders and positively affect organisations' attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders (Giguere and Dundes, 2002). In summary, when governments actively engage with organisations via policies and incentives, this reflects a collaborative effort that makes hiring managers more positively disposed towards rehiring ex-offenders. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

Year	Initiatives
2018-Nov:	Tax deductions for companies that employ ex-offenders, an initiative of the Malaysian government (Bernama, 2018b)
2019-Aug:	Corporate Smart Internship (CSI) Program to enhance skills training and employment opportunities for parolees, introduced by the MPD (Malaysian Prisons Department, 2019)
2020-Aug:	Job placement program for ex-prisoners, introduced by PERGAK (Sukaimi, 2020)
2020-Nov:	Continued tax deductions for companies employing ex-offenders in 2021, a Malaysian government initiative (Mohd Khalizan, 2020)
2021-Jul:	Wage subsidy program for hiring ex-offenders (Aziz Mohammed, 2021)
2021-Jul:	Recruitment incentives, with training costs of up to RM 7,000 met if ex-offenders are employed. Introduced by the Social Security Organisation (PERKESO, 2021)
2021-Nov:	Allocation under government Budget 2022 to create more employment opportunities for ex-prisoners (FMT, 2021)

**Source(s):** Compiled by authors

**Table 2.**  
Types of government incentives for organisations to hire ex-offenders

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H6. Government incentives positively influence hiring managers' attitudes toward rehiring ex-offenders.

### *Sub-model 3*

Sub-model 3 presents two potential predictors of perceived behavioural control (PBC), the ex-offender's skills and supporting documents. PBC reflects the perceived ease or difficulty that managers will face when hiring ex-offenders (Ajzen, 1991). As mentioned in the earlier discussion of PBC, hiring ex-offenders is a complex and layered process. It requires hiring managers to collaborate with other influential individuals in making hiring decisions—hiring managers do not have total control over these decisions. However, hiring managers can exercise greater control over the decision making when ex-offenders exhibit the skills demanded by organisations (person-job fit) and provide supporting documents that substantiate their credibility.

Person-job (P-J) fit refers to the “fit between an individual's skills and the needs of a particular profession” (Lewis, 2007). The theory of work adjustment establishes the foundation of the P-J fit model. It asserts that individual abilities are required to complement employment needs and, in exchange, the organisation must provide favourable conditions (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984). P-J fits are essential for individuals to complete the tasks assigned to them effectively, perform superior tasks and remain viable in the job market (Boon *et al.*, 2011; Werbel and Demarie, 2005). In regard to ex-offenders, hiring managers may commit to hiring them by knowing the benefits (i.e. P-J fit) this will bring to the organisation (Batastini *et al.*, 2014). Ex-offenders who joined vocational (Colquitt-Turks, 2019) and life skill programs were more likely to find employment (Bellotti *et al.*, 2005). Hiring managers' perceptions of ex-offenders' competencies positively influence the hiring decision (Young and Powell, 2015). In brief, hiring managers may exert greater control (PBC) over hiring ex-offenders with the requisite skills and expertise demanded by the organisation. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H7. Perceived skill level of ex-offenders positively influences hiring managers' perceived behavioural control in rehiring ex-offenders.

Supporting documents are the second factor that can influence whether hiring managers have total control (PBC) over hiring decisions. Supporting documents can be in the form of letters of recommendation, résumés, cover letters or educational transcripts (Doyle, 2021). Although an ex-offender generally has a weaker résumé (Pager, 2003), supporting documents enhance it. This raises their credibility and they stand a higher chance of securing work (Doherty, 2015).

The two primary sources of supporting documents are referral letters from ex-offenders' former employees and training credentials from prison training departments. Ex-offenders' former employers serve as essential referees for hiring managers when making a hiring decision (Visher and Travis, 2003; Visher *et al.*, 2011). Their references may confirm the professionalism that ex-offenders exhibited during their previous employment. Prison-based rehabilitation programs increase the offenders' competence and employment potential when released (Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe, 2012; Duwe and Clark, 2017). The Prison Department's validation of the credentials obtained by ex-offenders during prison rehabilitation and training programs is instrumental during the job application process. It serves as an essential document that enables hiring managers to overcome stigma and display greater control (PBC) during the hiring process.

Acknowledging the major influence of supporting documents on hiring managers during the job application process, intermediary agencies use these documents to link ex-offenders with potential organisations. In addition, these agencies use various techniques such as training, paid transitional work experience and job coaching to enhance ex-offenders' résumés and credibility (Holzer *et al.*, 2003). In brief, with supporting documents from

ex-offenders, hiring managers can exercise greater control during the hiring process. Based on the above discussion, it is hypothesised that:

- H8. Supporting documents by ex-offenders positively influence hiring managers' perceived behavioural control in rehiring ex-offenders.

## Study design

### *Respondents and data collection procedures*

The population of the study included all organisations that hire ex-offenders. The target respondents were hiring managers who actively engaged in hiring ex-offenders. A comprehensive database of firms hiring ex-offenders in Malaysia is unavailable, however. Thus, the best option was to engage with the Malaysian Prison Department. An initial meeting was held with the Department to obtain a list of organisations that accept prisoners on parole. The Prison Department did not provide this information due to data confidentiality but assisted by providing the details of the police officers responsible for paroled prisoners. These officers, who deal directly with organisations, acted as mediators between the researchers and the organisations, as well as acting as the enumerators. Before data collection, the researchers met the police officers to share the data collection procedures. Participation in the survey was voluntary. The questionnaire cover page explained the study's purpose and ethical considerations, especially data privacy; upon reading this, the respondents could either participate or withdraw from the survey. Data collection lasted approximately five months (October 2020–February 2021).

The study used the G\*power Software to calculate the minimum sample size. The study's maximum number of predictors was three; thus, with the effect size, significance level and statistical power at 0.15, 0.05 and 0.80, a minimum of 77 samples were required (Keshminder and Del Río, 2019). Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to recruit hiring managers who hired ex-offenders for their organisations. A total of 200 questionnaires were provided to the police officers and 135 valid questionnaires were returned. After the data cleaning process, 134 questionnaires were suitable for analysis. Overall, the sample consisted of 102 males (76.1%) and 32 females (23.9%). The majority of the respondents were Chinese (57 individuals, or 42.5%) and Malays (48 individuals, 35.8%) and these were employed with firms established after 1996 (77.7%). The respondents were primarily from the fisheries (29.1%), restaurant (21.6%) and agricultural (11.2%) sectors. From the total number of organisations, 106 organisations (71.1%) hired between one and three ex-offenders (See Table 3).

### *Questionnaire design*

The study's questionnaire was derived from previous studies but modified. Before the survey, a pilot test was necessary to determine the measurement items' accuracy and quality (Hunt *et al.*, 1982). Therefore, three groups were engaged: method experts (two experts), field experts (two experts) and actual respondents (five respondents). The initial stage involved a thorough discussion of the method with the field experts to identify errors and discrepancies in the survey questionnaire before engaging with the respondents. In the researchers' presence, five hiring managers from low-paying industries were given the questionnaire, regardless of whether they had hired ex-offenders or not. The respondents were required to complete the questionnaire and highlight any unclear or challenging items that needed to be addressed. Based on the respondents' feedback, the questions underwent minor changes. The questionnaire contained two segments. The first focused on demographic profiling, while the second concentrated on the constructs. The finalised questionnaire was then submitted to the Universiti Teknologi MARA Ethics Committee (UiTMREC) for approval.

The TBP base model consisted of four constructs: rehiring intention, attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Rehiring intention was measured using two items

	Frequency	Per cent (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	102	76.1
Female	32	23.9
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Malay	48	35.8
Chinese	57	42.5
Indian	27	20.1
Others	2	1.5
<i>Years of establishment</i>		
1975–1980	5	3.7
1981–1985	5	3.7
1986–1990	14	10.4
1991–1995	6	4.5
1996–2000	26	19.4
2001–2005	24	17.9
2006–2010	21	15.7
2011–2015	18	13.4
2016–2020	15	11.2
<i>Type of business</i>		
Manufacturing	7	5.2
Transport	7	5.2
Agriculture/Forestry	15	11.2
Sales Company	13	9.7
Construction	12	9.0
Fishery	39	29.1
Restaurant	29	21.6
Trading Company	9	6.7
Securities	1	0.7
Others	2	1.5
<i>Number of ex-offenders employed</i>		
1	50	37.3
2	38	28.4
3	18	13.4
4	10	7.5
5	7	5.2
6	1	0.7
7	4	3.0
8	1	0.7
9	3	2.2
12	2	1.5

**Table 3.**  
Respondents'  
demographic profile

adapted from [Ajzen \(2006\)](#). The measure of attitude involved three items, two adapted from [Ajzen \(2006\)](#) and one from [Conner \*et al.\* \(2001\)](#). For the subjective norm, there were three items, two adapted from [Ajzen \(2006\)](#) and one from [Tolliver \(2016\)](#). Two items from [Nysveen \*et al.\* \(2005\)](#) and two from [Conner \*et al.\* \(2001\)](#) comprised the four items to measure perceived behavioural control.

Organisational culture, risk and government incentives were the three predictors of attitude. The organisational culture measure consisted of three adapted items, two from [Yeung \*et al.\* \(1991\)](#) and one from [Osibanjo and Adeniji \(2013\)](#). Risk was measured using five items adapted from [Murray and Schlacter \(1990\)](#). Government incentives involved three items adapted from [Jasper and Waldhart \(2013\)](#). Examples of the items are shown in [Table 4](#).

**Table 4.**  
Measures

Code	Example item
RHI	I intend to hire ex-offenders
ATT	For me, hiring ex-offenders should be encouraged
SBN	I feel social pressure to hire ex-offenders for my organisation
PBC	Hiring ex-offenders is entirely within my control
ORC	Organisational belief positively affects individual values and culture
HRK	I think hiring ex-offenders will contribute to financial loss
GVI	I think the provision of government tax credits and incentives to my organisation encourages me to hire ex-offenders
HSK	I think it is important for ex-offenders to have skills when hiring them
SPD	Getting information about ex-offenders easily from former employers or prison officers is important in making hiring decisions

**Note(s):** Code: RHI = Rehiring Intention, ATT = Attitude, SBN = Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioural Control, ORC = Organisational Culture, HRK = Hiring Risk, GVI = Government Incentives, HSK = Skills, SPD = Supporting Documents

Skills and supporting documents were the predictors of perceived behavioural control. The measurement items for skills comprised four items adapted from [Aken and Michalisin \(2007\)](#), while supporting documents consisted of five adapted items, three from [Hunsinger and Smith \(2009\)](#) and two from [Pavlou and Fygenson \(2006\)](#). Five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” were used to evaluate all the constructs.

### PLS data analysis and results

The study employed partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling, using the SmartPLS software version 3.3.3 ([Ringle et al., 2015](#)) since it accommodates data on the non-normality issues that affect survey research ([Chin et al., 2003](#)). Multivariate normality was tested by engaging the Webpower website, as [Cain et al. \(2017\)](#) suggested. The results showed that multivariate skewness was 28.560 ( $p < 0.01$ ), while multivariate kurtosis was 133.899 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating the presence of multivariate data non-normality. To address non-normality, the bootstrapping procedure was run to generate the standard errors when testing the structural model.

#### *Common method bias (CMB)*

Since all the responses were collected from a single source, to ensure that the study did not suffer from CMB, a measured latent marker variable tactic was used ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#); [Tehseen et al., 2017](#)). Two social desirability measurement items, “I am quick to admit it when I make mistakes” ([Greenwald and Satow, 1970](#)) and “I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget” by [Strahan and Gerbasi \(1972\)](#) were used as the marker variables. After adding the marker variables to the three endogenous constructs in the model, the difference in the  $R^2$  observation was observed. The minimal  $R^2$  change (Rehiring Intention = 0.020, Perceived Behavioural Control = 0.055 and Attitude = 0.007) signalled no substantial CMB ([Tehseen et al., 2017](#)). To further confirm the absence of CMB, a full collinearity assessment was conducted, as suggested by [Kock and Lynn \(2012\)](#), [Kock \(2015\)](#). In regressing all the constructs against a random variable, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was observed ( $VIF \leq 5.0$ ). The analysis yielded a VIF of less than 0.5 (see [Table 5](#)), reflecting no serious threat of single-source bias in the study.

#### *Measurement model – assessing convergent and discriminant validity*

As part of the measurement model evaluation, an examination of the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were necessary to verify the validity

and reliability of the model, as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2019), Ramayah *et al.* (2018). The values of the three criteria should be as follows: loadings  $\geq 0.5$ , AVE  $\geq 0.5$  and CR  $\geq 0.7$ . All the indicator loadings, the CR values (0.74–0.96) and the AVE (0.59–0.91) met the threshold criteria, establishing the reliability and convergent validity (see Table 6).

The measurement model was then assessed for discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion recommended by Henseler *et al.* (2015) and enhanced by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). A threshold ratio of  $\leq 0.85$  validates that the constructs are distinct. From the analysis (see Table 7), it was evident that the nine constructs used in the study were different as all the HTMT ratios were  $\leq 0.85$ .

*Structural model – hypothesis testing*

In compliance with the method devised by Hair *et al.* (2019) and Ramayah *et al.* (2018), to assess the structural model using a 5,000-sample resample bootstrapping procedure, the path coefficients, standard errors, t-values and *p*-values were reported. The censure concerning the

Construct	ATT	SPD	GVI	HRK	ORC	PBC	RHI	HSK	SBN
VIF	2.078	2.131	2.554	1.826	1.25	2.152	2.775	3.325	2.666

**Note(s):** ATT = Attitude, SPD = Supporting Documents, GVI = Government Incentives, HRK = Hiring Risk, ORC = Organisational Culture, PBC = Perceived Behavioural Control, RHI = Rehiring Intention, HSK = Skills, SBN = Subjective Norm

**Table 5.**  
Full collinearity analysis

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Attitude	ATT2	0.919	0.797	0.667
	ATT3	0.699		
Supporting Documents	SPD2	0.891	0.948	0.859
	SPD3	0.948		
	SPD4	0.940		
Government Incentives	GVI1	0.946	0.952	0.869
	GVI2	0.915		
	GVI3	0.935		
Hiring Risk	HRK1	0.908	0.963	0.838
	HRK2	0.933		
	HRK3	0.894		
	HRK4	0.906		
	HRK5	0.936		
Organisational Culture	ORC1	0.913	0.940	0.840
	ORC2	0.906		
	ORC3	0.930		
Perceived Behavioural Control	PBC1	0.836	0.745	0.595
	PBC3	0.702		
Rehiring Intention	RHI1	0.958	0.958	0.919
	RHI2	0.960		
Subjective Norm	SBN2	0.883	0.757	0.613
	SBN3	0.668		
Skills	SKL1	0.891	0.947	0.857
	SKL2	0.936		
	SKL3	0.950		

**Note(s):** Item ATT1, SPD1, PBC2, PBC3 and SBN1 were deleted due to low loadings; CR (Composite Reliability); AVE (Average Variance Extracted)

**Table 6.**  
Convergent validity

usage of the *p*-value meant it was not a reliable criterion for judging the significance of the hypotheses (Hahn and Ang, 2017). In this study, the *p*-value criterion was complemented by other benchmarks, such as confidence intervals and effect sizes (see Table 8).

To address multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was observed. The VIF values were between 1.037 and 1.884 (see Table 5), considerably below 3 (Becker et al., 2015) and suggesting no multicollinearity. In terms of the hypothesis testing, as reported in Table 5, Attitude ( $\beta = 0.365, p < 0.01$ ) and Subjective Norm ( $\beta = 0.482, p < 0.01$ ) had a positive effect on Rehiring intention, while Perceived Behavioural Control had no effect on Rehiring intention, thus supporting hypothesis H1 and H2 while nullifying H3. Next, Organisational Culture ( $\beta = 0.216, p < 0.012$ ) and Government Incentives ( $\beta = 0.504, p < 0.001$ ) had a positive effect on Attitude, supporting hypothesis H4 and H6. Meanwhile, Hiring Risk had no effect on Attitude, so H5 was not supported. Finally, Skills ( $\beta = 0.708, p < 0.001$ ) positively affected Perceived Behavioural Control but Supporting Documents did not, supporting hypothesis H7 and nullifying H8.

Assessing the in-sample predictive power, the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) were 0.553 (Rehiring Intention), 0.374 (Attitude) and 0.466 (Perceived Behavioural Control). With reference to Hair et al. (2019) ( $R^2 = 0.75$  (substantial), 0.50 (moderate) and 0.25 (weak), these findings confirmed that all the values were acceptable for the type of model proposed in the study.

Next, assessing the construct's effect size, Cohen's  $f^2$  was employed (Cohen, 2013). This suggests that values above 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent minor, medium and major effects. Both Attitude ( $f^2 = 0.190$ ) and Subjective Norm ( $f^2 = 0.292$ ) demonstrated a medium effect size in generating  $R^2$  for Rehiring Intention. Similarly, Organisational Culture ( $f^2 = 0.072$ ) and

**Table 7.**  
Discriminant  
validity (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Attitude									
2. Supporting Documents	0.203								
3. Government Incentives	0.572	0.330							
4. Hiring Intention	0.632	0.377	0.705						
5. Hiring Risk	0.346	0.364	0.551	0.452					
6. Organisational Culture	0.315	0.049	0.187	0.212	0.086				
7. Perceived Behavioural Control	0.036	0.447	0.243	0.126	0.462	0.123			
8. Skills	0.068	0.685	0.367	0.333	0.479	0.219	0.682		
9. Subjective Norm	0.554	0.508	0.649	0.675	0.521	0.209	0.340	0.448	

**Table 8.**  
Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Errors	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	BCI LL	BCI UL	$f^2$	VIF
H1	ATT → RHI	0.365	0.086	4.225	$p < 0.001$	0.220	0.505	0.190	1.571
H2	SBN → RHI	0.482	0.090	5.343	$p < 0.001$	0.327	0.622	0.292	1.774
H3	PBC → RHI	0.024	0.073	0.332	0.370	-0.091	0.146	0.001	1.232
H4	ORC → ATT	0.216	0.096	2.257	0.012	0.065	0.377	0.072	1.037
H5	HRK → ATT	-0.050	0.074	0.667	0.252	-0.190	0.058	0.003	1.437
H6	GVI → ATT	0.504	0.116	4.340	$p < 0.001$	0.297	0.678	0.275	1.479
H7	SKL → PBC	0.708	0.083	8.503	$p < 0.001$	0.562	0.833	0.498	1.884
H8	SPD → PBC	-0.038	0.098	0.388	0.349	-0.191	0.128	0.001	1.884

**Note(s):** ATT = Attitude, SPD = Supporting Documents, GVI = Government Incentives, HRK = Hiring Risk, ORC = Organisational Culture, PBC = Perceived Behavioural Control, RHI = Rehiring Intention, HSK = Skills, SBN = Subjective Norm

Government Incentives ( $f^2 = 0.275$ ) exhibited medium and small effect sizes, respectively, in generating  $R^2$  for Attitude. Likewise, Skills ( $f^2 = 0.498$ ) produced a large effect size in developing  $R^2$  for Perceived Behavioural Control.

In checking for the model's predictive relevance, a blindfolding procedure was applied (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1977) with an omission distance of 10. All the endogenous variables registered  $Q^2$  values greater than zero—0.530 (Rehiring Intention), 0.320 (Attitude) and 0.442 (Perceived Behavioural Control)—confirming the predictive relevance of the model.

To substantiate the model's predictive relevance, PLS-Predict was used, as suggested by Shmueli *et al.* (2016). PLS-Predict is a holdout sample-based procedure that generates case-level predictions on an item or a construct level with a 10-fold approach to checking for predictive relevance. Shmueli *et al.* (2016) suggested that if all the item differences (PLS - LM) were lower, there is strong predictive power. If all are higher, then predictive relevance is not confirmed. Simultaneously, if the majority is low, there is moderate predictive power, while if the minority is low, there is low predictive power. By referring to Shmueli *et al.* (2016), the study's predictive results were ascertained. First, all the Perceived Behavioural Control and Rehiring Intention items exhibited lower errors than the LM model, reflecting high predictive power. Second, for Attitude, out of two items, only one displayed low errors, indicating low predictive power (see Table 9).

**Discussion and implications**

The current study investigating the rehiring intention among hiring managers led to interesting findings. For sub-model 1, the study supported the positive relationship between attitude and subjective norm on one hand and the intention to rehire ex-offenders on the other. Subjective norm exerts a higher variance in intention to rehire or hire ex-offenders than attitude. This corresponds to research by Ang *et al.* (2015), who found social pressure to be a strong predictor among Malaysians who hire individuals with disabilities. The findings may also signal the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Malaysian government, the MPD and NGOs to reduce stigma towards ex-offenders through community engagement. With more campaigns and media exposure promoting the provision of second chances to ex-offenders, organisations have started accepting ex-offenders. In addition, through experience sharing, employers who have hired ex-offenders might have changed their social circle-influenced perceptions of ex-offenders, which collectively impact rehiring intention.

In this study, the variance of attitude in terms of rehiring ex-offenders was also notable. Attitude plays a critical role in influencing hiring managers' decisions to rehire ex-offenders. In previous literature, it has been strongly argued that social stigma is a significant hindrance for ex-offenders to secure employment (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010; Jung, 2015). Research by Ang *et al.* (2015), which is relatable to the context of this study, examined perspectives on hiring Malaysians with disabilities. Contrary to the current findings, the previous authors found that attitude did not influence the intention to hire individuals with disabilities.

	PLS			LM			PLS-LM		
	RMSE	MAE	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE	MAE	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE	MAE	$Q^2_{predict}$
ATT2	0.432	0.262	0.290	0.442	0.304	0.255	-0.010	-0.042	0.035
ATT3	0.593	0.513	0.094	0.578	0.453	0.139	0.015	0.060	-0.045
PBC1	0.827	0.669	0.313	0.892	0.724	0.199	-0.065	-0.055	0.114
PBC3	0.749	0.631	0.200	0.795	0.645	0.100	-0.046	-0.014	0.100
RHI1	0.537	0.385	0.456	0.592	0.409	0.340	-0.055	-0.024	0.116
RHI2	0.421	0.300	0.472	0.443	0.307	0.416	-0.022	-0.007	0.056

**Note(s):** ATT = Attitude, PBC = Perceived Behavioural Control, RHI = Rehiring Intention

**Table 9.**  
PLS predict

The difference between the two studies is that rehiring intention was assessed in the current work. The employers had had exposure to ex-offenders; thus, it was evident that interaction with ex-offenders (or stigmatised individuals) drives positive attitudes among hiring managers and enhances their likelihood of hiring these individuals (Obatusin and Ritter-Williams, 2019; Young and Powell, 2015).

To promote positive social pressures and attitudes among organisations to hire ex-offenders, the Government and NGOs must expand their efforts for society to actively engage with ex-offenders. Social contact enhances likability and positively impacts organisations' perceptions of and decisions about job applicants with known criminal records (Allport *et al.*, 1954). More focused engagement sessions are required between hiring managers and ex-offenders. The Prison Department can organise such meetings between hiring managers and prisoners nearing the end of their sentence. Engagement could come through job fairs organised in prison. This would allow hiring managers to interact with ex-offenders and understand them better, thus breaking the social stigma. Besides, the MPD or NGOs can manage sharing sessions between organisations that hire ex-offenders and those that do not. These sessions would allow organisations hiring ex-offenders to share their experiences, which would disseminate positive ideas about ex-offenders among the corporate community.

Interestingly, perceived behavioural control did not influence employers' intentions to rehire ex-offenders, even if they had previously done so. Many past studies found that perceived behavioural control was not a significant predictor of behavioural intention (Lee and Lina Kim, 2018; Smith, 2015). Hiring ex-offenders is a highly scrutinised and multi-layered process. The hiring manager does not have complete influence over the conditions that encourage the recruiting of ex-offenders.

Turning to sub-model 2, government incentives and organisational cultures positively impacted attitudes. Government incentives were found to be a stronger predictor of an employer's attitude than organisational culture. These results are congruent with past studies and literature arguing that government incentives foster behaviour among employers that is more accepting of ex-offenders (Giguere and Dundes, 2002; Garfinkel, 1956). Government incentives normalise the hiring of ex-offenders. The Malaysian government must continue making annual budget allocations to incentivise organisations to hire ex-offenders. Incentives such as tax deductions, wage subsidies and training subsidies when organisations hire ex-offenders would potentially promote favourable attitudes towards ex-offenders. Another scheme that the government could introduce is an incentive for organisations to substitute foreign workers with ex-offenders. Malaysia hosts many migrant workers from underdeveloped countries, mainly Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, India, Vietnam and the Philippines (Kaur, 2007; Othman, 2015). The number of foreign workers arriving in Malaysia is steadily increasing, causing the country growing concern (Mohamed *et al.*, 2012). Thus, directly channelling migrant workers' job opportunities to ex-offenders may benefit Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the findings concerning the organisational culture construct were evidence that Malaysia is more accepting of diversity in terms of its organisational culture. Such cultures breed favourable attitudes towards ex-offenders (Anazodo *et al.*, 2019). Since the respondents in the study had experience of dealing with ex-offenders, they had begun to embrace less intolerant organisational cultures (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010). Formal guidelines and practices for hiring ex-offenders promote positive cultures in organisations. However, most companies lack formal policies on hiring ex-offenders (Lageson *et al.*, 2015). It is suggested that the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia must encourage and assist organisations to develop formal hiring policies for ex-offenders. Hiring managers must effectively articulate the policies throughout the organisation to promote positive behaviour towards ex-offenders.

However, in sub-model 2, the risk of hiring ex-offenders was not a significant predictor of attitude, contradicting the findings of previous research (Campbell and Goodstein, 2001; Lobb *et al.*, 2007; Giguere and Dundes, 2002). It is important to note that this study's respondents had previously hired ex-offenders. According to the demographic profile (see Table 1), most ex-offenders are employed in low-skilled and low-paying jobs. Low-skilled jobs exhibit less discrimination against ex-offenders (Ahmed and Lång, 2017). Therefore, no serious risk is imposed on the image, productivity, or employees of such organisations (Jung, 2015; Fahey *et al.*, 2006; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008). Besides, the active interaction that employers had had with ex-offenders may mean they no longer feared the potential risk that ex-offenders might entail for an organisation (Giguere and Dundes, 2002).

Lastly, in sub-model 3, ex-offenders' skills positively affected perceived behavioural control. Making hiring decisions based on ex-offenders' skills is fully under the hiring manager's control. In the literature on ex-offender employment, it has been argued that ex-offenders with competitive skill sets are more likely to succeed during the interview process (Young and Powell, 2015; Goodstein, 2019). In contrast, Supporting Documents had no impact on perceived behavioural control. Making the decision to hire an ex-offender is an excessively detailed process and the decision makers must ensure that employing the ex-offender has no negative repercussions. Hiring managers often ask probing questions to trigger the ex-offenders to expose their true selves, sometimes asking the reasons they were involved in the crime and how prepared they are to re-establish themselves. Displaying truth and integrity in the interview is of paramount importance to hiring ex-offenders (Obatusin and Ritter-Williams, 2019). Making hiring decisions based on the ex-offender's interview performance is fully under the hiring manager's control and not based on the supporting documents validating the ex-offender's credibility.

To increase the employment opportunities for ex-offenders during the hiring process, they must be equipped with interpersonal and interview skills. Prison-based rehabilitation and training must nurture these skills since such programs have been shown to improve ex-offenders' employment prospects (Duwe and Clark, 2017; Lockwood *et al.*, 2012; Northcutt Bohmert and Duwe, 2012). With reference to Table 3, most organisations hiring ex-offenders offer low-paying jobs. Around 70% of these are in fisheries, restaurants, agriculture and construction. Industries willing to hire ex-offenders generally offer low paying jobs (Lageson *et al.*, 2015; Nally *et al.*, 2014; Vuolo *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, those training ex-offenders must consider the skills required to obtain higher-paying jobs and those demanded by the market. Possessing these skills would increase the ex-offender's chance of securing a higher-paying job. Aside from skills learnt in prison, the government can establish an employment-based re-entry unit that would provide ex-offenders with various transition skill programs, such as learning technical, job search and life skills; these would create better employment prospects among ex-offenders.

The theoretical contribution of this study's findings is to support the reliability of an expanded TPB model for predicting rehiring intention in the context of rehiring ex-offenders. Ajzen (2011) claimed that the TPB was an exhaustive and complete theory. However, the present study has extended the TPB into the realm of hiring ex-offenders, proving that new understanding and knowledge can be derived by applying a robust research process and with the support of comprehensive literature. In this study, the TPB was integrated with relevant theories from different fields like sociology, psychology, organisational behaviour and crime while merging variables available from the literature on ex-offenders. The theories were the institutional theory, self-control theory, signalling theory and theory of work adjustment. This merger opens a new trajectory of knowledge and conceptualisation to study hiring managers' behaviours more comprehensively. Finally, through the theoretical conceptualisation, the findings of this study provided a better understanding of rehiring intention from a hiring manager's perspective.

### Limitations and future directions

A critical drawback of this analysis is that it was restricted to Malaysian companies, raising the question of whether the results can be generalised to other countries. More details from different developed economies are needed for the hypotheses to be confirmed as applicable to other contexts. A longitudinal analysis may support the results. Another limitation is that the study specifically surveyed hiring managers who have hired from this population before. If the sample was composed of hiring managers who had never hired from this population before, a difference in the findings is highly possible.

It will be interesting to examine perceived behavioural control and supporting documents in greater detail using a qualitative approach for future work. In the case of unfamiliar hiring managers, supporting documents may provide additional information to them, affecting their decision making. Therefore, it is essential to explore in-depth which forms of information and resources constitute total control for employers during the hiring process.

### Conclusion

By extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour into the field of ex-offender employability, this study sought to investigate hiring managers' perspectives of rehiring ex-offenders. Using the PLS-SEM framework, three sub-models within the research framework were examined. The first sub-model examined the impact of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control (PCB) on hiring managers' rehiring of ex-offenders. For this sub-model, only two hypothesised linkages were verified: attitude and subjective norm. Next, in sub-model 2, organisational culture, perceived risk and government incentives were hypothesised to affect employer attitudes. However, the findings indicate that from the three constructs, only organisational culture and government incentives impacted hiring managers' attitudes. Lastly, sub-model 3 investigated the effects of ex-offenders' skills and supporting documents on PCB, confirming that only their skills positively impacted PCB. These findings support the view that hiring managers from organisations that hire ex-offenders are inclined to rehire ex-offenders. Strategic collaboration between the government, the Malaysian Prison Department, business organisations and NGOs may reduce the social stigma against ex-offenders and increase their hiring possibilities.

### Notes

1. Future researchers are encouraged to use recent terminologies like "individuals with a criminal history", "system-impacted" and "returning citizens" instead of ex-offenders, as suggested by reviewers during the review process. However, for this paper, researchers were allowed to use the term since the term ex-offenders were used in the questionnaire—to avoid issues about questionnaire design, validity and reliability.
2. Section in a job application form asking candidates whether they possess a criminal record.
3. Rehiring intention refers to a hiring manager who is satisfied with the hiring of an ex-offender and intends to rehire ex-offenders, in line with the literature on repurchase intention (further explained in the hypothesis development section).

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**Corresponding author**

J.S. Keshminder can be contacted at: [keshm967@uitm.edu.my](mailto:keshm967@uitm.edu.my)

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