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# A theory of planned behavior perspective on hiring Malaysians with disabilities

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities (PWDs) is nothing new. Many people fail to recognize that the disabled population is a significant but largely untapped source of human resources. Prejudices and misconceptions about PWDs' ability to perform and compete in the open market are likely to be the cause. While the topic of PWDs' employment has been substantially studied, no known research has explored the applicability of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in the context of hiring PWDs. In addressing the research gap, this paper details a preliminary study which examined the influence of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were obtained via a survey on 200 employers representing private organizations in East Malaysia. To examine the hypothesized linkages within the TPB framework, the authors conducted PLS analysis. The authors also examined the measurement model using PLS.

**Findings** – The results of the PLS analysis indicated that subjective norm and perceived behavioral control significantly predicted managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. Contrary to expectations, the data did not provide support for the influence of attitude toward hiring decisions for PWDs.

**Research limitations/implications** – Given the research approach, generalizing the findings must be done with caution. Longitudinal studies may provide further support to the results. Future studies can extend the TPB framework by examining other variables such as attributes of Malaysians with disabilities or those of hiring managers. Hiring behavior can also be included in the model to confirm if behavioral intention of hiring will evidently result in actual hiring of Malaysians with disabilities.

**Practical implications** – This study found the TPB to have a predictive power in the area of hiring PWDs. Results obtained can serve as a basis for future works in this area. The study also offers implications for the development of public and organizational policies that can better promote and manage the careers of Malaysians with disabilities.

**Social implications** – An enhanced knowledge about the factors which can influence managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities will help increase the employment of Malaysians with disabilities.

**Originality/value** – This study is a pioneering attempt to explore the applicability of the TPB within the domain of managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. The use of PLS in disability studies is also noteworthy.

**Keywords** Theory of planned behaviour, Disabilities, Hiring decisions, Malaysians, PLS

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

Disability and poverty are dynamic, complex, and intricately linked phenomena (Mitra *et al.*, 2011). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are as such among the poorest of the poor in all societies. They constitute some 20 percent of the poorest people in Asia (United Nations, 2006). The appalling incidence of poverty among PWDs to date remains a long-standing global issue which could be closely linked to their exclusion from education, employment, and other economic and social opportunities. Kaye's (1998) study found that 38.7 percent of PWDs who do not work live in poverty compared to 15.1 percent of those who work at least some of the time. Clearly, employment can be an effective long-run measure to empower PWDs to be economically independent and eventually overcome poverty (Palmer-Mehta, 2013).

Despite the importance of work to PWDs, a large body of research (e.g. Capella, 2003; Hasazi *et al.*, 1989) indicates that the unemployment rates and advancements of this population remain high as PWDs face various hurdles in the job market. A plausible cause could be non-disabled people's negative attitudes toward PWDs which are often rooted in misinformation and lack of understanding of disability (Mitra *et al.*, 2011). PWDs are often stereotyped as weak, dependent, and incompetent (Bell and Klein, 2001; Fichten and Amsel, 1988). Similarly subjected to such stereotyping and prejudices by employers, disabled job applicants would have a lower chance of getting hired when compared to their non-disabled counterparts. According to Hunt (1966), the problems faced by PWDs have little to do with their physical attributes, but rather a consequence of forms of social organization which discriminate them.

The current paper is an attempt to extend past research on the employment of Malaysians with disabilities by examining whether attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control could potentially influence managerial intention to hire PWDs. This paper is relevant for theoretical and practical reasons. First, it contributes to a growing body of knowledge on the employment of Malaysians with disabilities. Disability data are much needed to aid the formulation and implementation of effective public and organizational policies that can better promote and manage the careers of Malaysians with disabilities. Within the measurement and structural models of partial least squares (PLS), the paper also aimed to test the robustness of Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior (TPB) in the domain of hiring intention for PWDs.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the literature on PWDs' employment in relation to the research context. Section 3 focuses on the TPB and the research hypotheses. Subsequent sections of the paper are concerned with PLS data analyses which include the assessments of the measurement and structural models. The last two sections deal with the implications of the findings and suggestions for future research, respectively.

## 2. PWDs and employment

There are over 650 million PWDs in the world, with about 400 million residing in the Asian and Pacific regions (United Nations, 2013). The exact number of PWDs in Malaysia is to date unknown. However, the official number for those who are registered with the Social Welfare Department of Malaysia is available and stands at 445,006 as of 2012. Given that the registration of PWDs in Malaysia is not mandatory but done on a voluntary basis, this figure is likely to be a conservative estimate of the number of PWDs in the country (Ang, 2012).

Disability studies invariably revealed a large discrepancy in labor force participation between the disabled and non-disabled population. A recent Labor Force Survey (Marangozov *et al.*, 2013) in the UK states that PWDs are now more likely to be employed than they were in previous years. But when compared to their non-disabled counterparts, this population remains significantly less likely to be in employment. It is also reported that 46.3 percent of working-age PWDs are employed compared to 76.4 percent of working-age non-PWDs in 2012 (Marangozov *et al.*, 2013). There is therefore a 30.1 percentage point gap between disabled and non-disabled people, representing over two million people (Marangozov *et al.*, 2013).

Past research has also disclosed that the unemployment rate for the non-disabled population in industrial nations is 10 percent in comparison with between 40 and 60 percent for those in less developed or developing countries (Neufeldt and Albright, 1998). In Singapore, for instance, the unemployment rate for PWDs is reported to be as high as 53.3 percent (Lim and Ng, 2001). On the Malaysian front, the Ministry of Human Resources (2010) reported that a staggering 95 percent of Malaysians with disabilities is unemployed. This high unemployment rate could be attributed to a multiple of complex factors. One reason could be that Malaysians with disabilities may be in reality lack the education and skills to be considered for open employment (Ang, 2012, 2014). But a majority of them have expressed that if given the opportunity they are able and willing to work (Ministry of Human Resources, 2010; Tiun and Khoo, 2013). Indeed, PWDs represent a significant source of labor but lamentably one which has been overlooked and underutilized (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2008; Salleh *et al.*, 2001). Seemingly, employers in Malaysia would rather seek foreign workers than employing Malaysians with disabilities who are able and willing to work. Why have Malaysian employers mostly ignored this large labor pool? A lack of understanding of disability that in turn breeds unfounded concerns about hiring PWDs could be a probable cause (Gilbridge *et al.*, 2000). There is empirical evidence which suggests most employers are not very proactive in hiring PWDs and that most hold stereotypical beliefs about the ability of PWDs to perform in the workplace (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2008). In effect, PWDs are “risky hires” to these employers.

From the foregoing discussion, we deem it worthwhile to examine whether other factors such as attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control can influence employers’ intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. These three determinants of interest represent the core tenets of the TPB and they will be the focus of the following section.

### 3. The applicability of the TPB

The most widely researched models in consumer behavior are the theories of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). The TPB is essentially an extension of the TRA. The latter was found to be inadequate in explaining behaviors that appeared to be not completely voluntary and not under control (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, a new variable known as perceived behavioral control was added to the model giving rise to the TPB.

Basically, the TPB represents a link between beliefs and behaviors. It operates on the basis that behavior can be deliberative and planned. The theory also has it that the best way to predict behavior is to measure behavioral intention. Behavioral intention is in turn viewed as a function of three conceptually independent variables or belief-based measures (i.e. attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control). As a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived

behavioral control over a certain behavior, the stronger would be a person's intention to perform the behavior in question.

Attitude reflects a person's evaluation of and beliefs about the significant consequences of performing a behavior. According to Cheng *et al.* (2006), before deciding to engage in a certain behavior, a person tends to assess the benefits and costs resulting from the behavior. So, when a person has positive attitude toward a specific behavior, she is likely to perform the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1991, 2006; Cheng *et al.*, 2006; Han *et al.*, 2010).

The second determinant of behavioral intention is subjective norm which represents the beliefs about the normative norm of significant others (e.g. relatives, close friends, co-workers, or business partners) (Ajzen, 2002). The theory holds that a person's motivation to engage in a specific behavior will be largely determined by the perceived preferences of her significant referents.

The third independent variable of intention is perceived behavioral control. It is seen as the perceived ease or difficulty in performing a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Specifically, perceived behavioral control assesses "the perception of how well one can control factors that may facilitate/constrain the actions needed to deal with a specific situation" (Han *et al.*, 2010, p. 604). Interestingly, past studies have reported that when an individual has little control over her act due to the lack or absence of required resources, her behavioral intention will be lowered despite the existence of positive attitude or supportive subjective norm concerning the intended behavior (Han *et al.*, 2010).

Because of its relative robustness, the TPB has garnered much support in numerous domains like psychology, health, sociology, marketing, consumer behavior, and other disciplines of knowledge. For instance, it has been applied in studies predicting human behavior in blood donation (e.g. Giles *et al.*, 2004), physical activities (e.g. Hagger *et al.*, 2001), condom use (e.g. Albarracin *et al.*, 2001), leisure (e.g. Ajzen and Driver, 1992), diet (e.g. Conner *et al.*, 2003), obesity (Liou and Bauer, 2007), green hotel choice (e.g. Han *et al.*, 2010), and more recently, hiring intention for older workers (Lu *et al.*, 2011). However, no known research has explored the applicability of the TPB within the context of hiring decisions for PWDs. Hence, this paper represents a pioneering attempt to incorporate the core tenets of the TPB in explaining hiring decisions for PWDs in Malaysia. This begs the question, "Why the adoption of the TPB as baseline theory?"

First, making hiring decisions for PWDs is neither a straightforward action nor under complete volitional control (Ajzen, 1991). Rather it is governed by personal factors and/or environmental constraints which may include negative attitudes of the hiring managers toward disabled job applicants or the absence/lack of hiring policies and workplace accommodation for disabled employees. We argue that the TPB is appropriate for purposes of this study because the model incorporates a measure of perceived behavioral control which would allow prediction of behaviors that are not completely within volitional control such as hiring PWDs. Clearly, the addition of this construct can provide useful information on the potential personal and environmental barriers to hiring PWDs as perceived by the hiring managers.

Second, the theory presents a useful and meaningful link between managerial attitudes, subjective norm, and intention to hire PWDs. And since hiring intention is a good predictor of actual hiring of this population (Ajzen, 2006; Lu *et al.*, 2011; Zanten, 2005), the application of the TPB can lend to more in-depth study on the employment of PWDs. Finally, the robustness of the TPB can be tested in another discipline of knowledge such as human resource practices.

#### 4. Hypotheses development

Within the TPB framework, this paper hypothesized that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control may influence intention to hire PWDs. Ajzen (1991) and Kim and Hunter (1993) reported that attitude influences intention, while in turn, intention predicts behavior. Another study (e.g. Zanten, 2005) similarly established the strong correlation between attitude and intention. In the case of hiring decisions for Malaysians with disabilities, the employer must first have a favorable attitude toward hiring PWDs before this attitude can translate to intention to hire PWDs. Simply put, it is expected that having a favorable attitude toward hiring PWDs will increase an employer's intention to hire PWDs. Conversely, an unfavorable attitude toward hiring PWDs will decrease intention to hire a disabled person in the workplace. Thus, we advanced the following:

*H1.* Attitude toward hiring Malaysians with disabilities has a significant relationship with intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities.

When a manager perceives that hiring PWDs is a proper behavior as defined by social norms, her motivation to comply by enacting the socially desirable behavior will increase. In other words, if hiring PWDs is viewed favorably by a manager's social circle, she is most likely to have increased intention to hire workers with disabilities. However, if the manager's referents opine that PWDs are "risky hires," the manager's intention to hire PWDs will tend to be lowered. Hence:

*H2.* Subjective norm has a significant relationship with intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities.

The third predictor of intention to hire PWDs is perceived behavioral control which is the perceived ease or difficulty in hiring PWDs (Ajzen, 1991). Previous studies have reported that when an individual has little control over her act due to the lack or absence of required resources, her behavioral intention will be lowered despite the existence of positive attitude or supportive subjective norm concerning the intended behavior (Han *et al.*, 2010). In a similar vein, Ajzen (2002) argues that having a sufficient degree of actual control over one's behavior would allow the person to carry out her intention as and when the opportunity arises. Given the above, if hiring decisions for PWDs is completely under an employer's control, the effect on intention to hire is likely to be increased. On the contrary, when the manager lacks complete control over hiring decisions for PWDs, her intention to hire PWDs will be accordingly lowered. Thus, we proposed that:

*H3.* Perceived behavioral control in hiring Malaysians with disabilities has a significant relationship with intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities.

#### 5. Methodology

This section first discusses the profile of the respondents. Then, the measures employed in the survey instrument are presented. Finally, the data collection process is detailed.

##### 5.1 Respondents

The unit of analysis was non-disabled employers representing private organizations across a broad array of industries located in Sabah and Labuan, East Malaysia. The Malaysian Employer Directory 2010 published by the Ministry of Human

Resources (2010) provided us a listing of private companies in Sabah and Labuan, totaling 574. To ensure that we had a truly representative employer sample, we randomly selected every second company in the list resulting in a sampling frame of 287 companies. But only 278 agreed to participate in the study and we subsequently obtained a total of 200 completed questionnaires.

As shown in Table I, 53.5 percent of the 200 respondents were females and 46.5 percent were males. Chinese employers (114 or 57 percent) were the majority in the sample, followed by Bumiputera (indigenous group) Sabah (40 or 20 percent), Malay (29 or 14.5 percent), other (ten or 5 percent), Indian (four or 2 percent), and Bumiputera Sarawak (three or 1.5 percent). The respondents were mostly running real estate/renting/service business (42 or 21 percent), wholesale/retail/repair business (40 or 20 percent), manufacturing companies (31 or 15.5 percent), hotels and restaurants (23 or 11.5 percent), financial institutions (19 or 9.5 percent), educational institutions (nine or 4.5 percent), health and social work organizations (five or 2.5 percent), and other business types (31 or 15.5 percent). The other business category comprised of companies dealing with engineering support and maintenance (eight), freight transport by road (seven), shipping (five), taxis for rent (four), petroleum refineries (two), security (two), industrial chemical (two), and transport equipment (one). A little over half of the companies (104 or 52 percent) were small-sized enterprises that have only ten and below employees, 74 (37 percent) were medium-sized enterprises that have between 11 and 100 employees, and 22 (11 percent) were large enterprises that have 101 and above employees. A total of 52 (26 percent) respondents reported that they were owners of the business.

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	%
<i>Gender</i>	200	100
Female	107	53.5
Male	93	46.5
<i>Ethnicity</i>	200	100
Malay	29	14.5
Chinese	114	57.0
Indian	4	2.0
Bumiputera Sabah	40	20.0
Bumiputera Sarawak	3	1.5
Other	10	5.0
<i>Business type</i>	200	100
Real estate/renting/business service	42	21.0
Wholesale/retail/repair	40	20.0
Finance	19	9.5
Hotels and restaurants	23	11.5
Manufacturing	31	15.5
Health and social work	5	2.5
Education	9	4.5
Other	31	15.5
<i>Organization size</i>	200	100
10 and below	104	52.0
11-100	74	37.0
101 and above	22	11.0

**Table I.**  
Profile of  
respondents

### 5.2 Measurement

We used a survey questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire comprises five sections of which one section is on demographic information and the remaining four have five-Likert-scaled items measuring attitude toward hiring PWDs, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control in hiring decisions for PWDs, and intention to hire PWDs. To ensure that responses were provided within a common frame of reference, the survey includes a definition of PWDs adopted from Malaysia's Person with Disabilities Act (2008).

Table II shows some example measurement items and the sources from which they were taken. To elaborate, we employed Ajzen's (2006) scale to gauge attitude and subjective norm using four and six items, respectively. Perceived behavioral control was measured using four items taken from Nysveen *et al.* (2005). We adopted three items from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) to measure intention.

Prior to the actual fieldwork, we conducted a pilot test to ensure that the respondents had the correct understanding of the questionnaire items. The pilot test indicated that the respondents took an average of ten minutes to complete the survey. The outcome of the pilot test also suggests that no amendments to the questionnaire in terms of its contents and layout were necessary.

### 5.3 Data collection

This study employed the drop-and-collect survey method (Walker, 1976) for data collection. A cover letter accompanying the survey explained the objectives of the study and assured respondents of their anonymity in an attempt to facilitate candor. Initially, we contacted the 287 companies by telephone to determine the employers' willingness to participate in the study. Consequently, we had 278 companies that agreed to do so. We then made personal visits to these companies during which we distributed the survey. We also stressed the importance of ensuring that the questionnaires were filled out only by company personnel who are responsible for the hiring of employees. However, whether they might or might not have employed disabled workers in their companies was immaterial. After two weeks, we returned to the companies again to collect the completed questionnaires. Overall, we received 200 usable questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 71.9 percent. The next section details the PLS approach to data analysis and the corresponding results.

## 6. PLS data analysis and results

The research model was evaluated using PLS which is a variance-based approach to structural equation modeling (SEM) (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Three aspects of PLS render it a fitting statistical tool for this study. First, PLS is well suited for analyzing predictive models with multiple-item constructs. Second, if appropriately applied, this method

Code	Example item	Source
ATT	For me, hiring PWDs should be encouraged	Ajzen (2006)
SN	Most people who are important to me think that I should hire PWDs	Ajzen (2006)
PBC	I have the necessary means and resources to hire PWDs	Nysveen <i>et al.</i> (2005)
ITH	I intend to hire PWDs	Ajzen and Fishbein (1980)

**Table II.**  
Measures

**Notes:** ATT, attitude toward hiring PWDs; SN, subjective norm; PBC, perceived behavioral control in hiring decisions; ITH, intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities



offers high efficiency in parameter estimation which is manifested in its greater statistical power than that of covariance-based SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2014). It can also simultaneously test the measurement model and the structural model (Barclay *et al.*, 1995; Hulland, 1999).

The PLS analysis follows a two-step process. The process involves separate assessments of the measurement model and the structural model. The current study employed this two-step process in analyzing the data. To elaborate, in the first step, we examined the psychometric properties of the measurement model which show how the constructs are measured (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Then, we tested the structural model which specifies how the constructs are related to each other in the model. We describe these analyses in the following sections.

### 6.1 The measurement model

Assessment of the measurement model subscribes to a number of criteria. First, we assessed the convergent validity of the scales by applying three indicators namely factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability. As reported in Table III, the factor loadings for all items exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Lee and Kozar, 2008) indicating convergent validity. Specifically, all items exhibited high loadings (in the range of 0.76-0.92) on their own constructs (highlighted values) and no items loaded higher on constructs they were not intended to measure (Golicic *et al.*, 2012).

Besides factor loadings, AVE, composite reliability, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for all the constructs were also examined. Table IV shows that all AVE values exceeded the

Item	ATT	SN	PBC	ITH
ATT1	0.78	0.21	0.18	0.32
ATT2	0.81	0.11	0.39	0.41
ATT3	0.86	0.28	0.17	0.26
SN1	0.31	0.85	0.19	0.47
SN2	0.37	0.76	0.30	0.60
SN3	0.30	0.81	0.15	0.49
PBC1	0.20	0.17	0.79	0.16
PBC2	0.28	0.31	0.92	0.38
PBC3	0.12	0.15	0.85	0.14
PBC4	0.10	0.20	0.80	0.28
ITH1	0.25	0.56	0.33	0.89
ITH2	0.27	0.43	0.31	0.79
ITH3	0.35	0.64	0.22	0.88

**Notes:** ATT, attitude; SN, subjective norm; PCB, perceived behavioral control; ITH, intention

**Table III.**  
Factor loadings and  
cross-loadings

Construct	AVE	Composite reliability	$R^2$	Cronbach's $\alpha$
ATT	0.61	0.86	–	0.79
SN	0.56	0.88	–	0.84
PBC	0.71	0.91	–	0.87
ITH	0.73	0.89	0.45	0.81

**Notes:** ATT, attitude; SN, subjective norm; PBC, perceived behavioral control; ITH, intention

**Table IV.**  
Reliability and  
convergent validity

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34,3

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recommended value of 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), suggesting adequate convergent validity. Similarly, the composite reliability values were well above the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Also, the  $\alpha$  values met the minimum threshold of 0.60 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Acceptable or high internal consistency demonstrates the appropriateness of the scales used in capturing the constructs under investigation. On the basis of the overall results, we can conclude that the items used in this study have acceptable convergent validity. Hence, all items were retained for further data analysis.

Next, we examined the discriminant validity of the scales following Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981); i.e., the square root of the AVE from the construct should be greater than the correlations shared between that constructs and others in the model. Table V compares the correlations among the constructs with the square root of the AVE (which appears diagonally in the table). The values of the square root of the AVE were found to be greater than the inter-construct correlations. Further, the values were greater than the recommended value of 0.707 (Lee and Kozar, 2008). We can therefore conclude that all constructs exhibited acceptable discriminant validity.

### 6.2 The structural model

Since PLS is conducted on the basis of non-parametric technique, we performed bootstrapping with a sample size of 500, while our actual sample size stood at 200. The structural model of PLS was then examined to see whether our hypotheses were supported by the data or not. The results are presented in Table VI and Figure 1.

The SEM provides two measures namely the path coefficient and the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$  value). The path coefficient represents the strength of the relationship from one path to another, whereas the  $R^2$  value is a measure of the model's predictive accuracy. The latter also represents the amount of variance in the dependent variable explained by all the independent constructs linked to it.

**Table V.**  
Latent variable  
correlation matrix

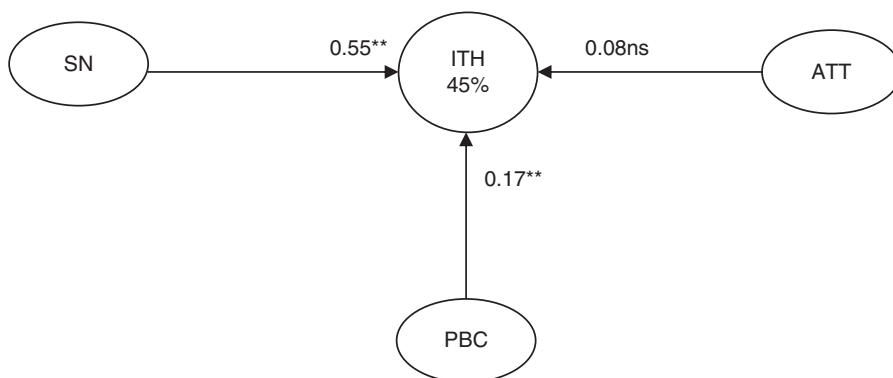
Construct	ATT	SN	PBC	ITH
ATT	0.78			
SN	0.49	0.75		
PBC	0.26	0.25	0.84	
ITH	0.40	0.63	0.33	0.85

**Notes:** ATT, attitude; SN, subjective norm; PCB, perceived behavioral control; ITH, intention

**Table VI.**  
Structural  
model results

Casual path	Hypothesis	Path coefficient	<i>t</i> -value	Supported
ATT → ITH	H1	0.08	1.42	No
SN → ITH	H2	0.55	10.47**	Yes
PBC → ITH	H3	0.17	3.05*	Yes

**Notes:** ATT, attitude; SN, subjective norm; PCB, perceived behavioral control; ITH, intention.  
\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$



**Figure 1.**  
Analyzed  
research model

**Notes:** ns, not significant; ATT, attitude; SN, subjective norm; PCB, perceived behavioral control; ITH, intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. \*\* $p < 0.01$

It can be observed in Table VI that the path coefficients for two hypothesized linkages were positive and statistically significant (at  $p < 0.01$ ). Specifically, the association between subjective norm and intention to hire was statistically significant ( $b = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), hence supporting *H2*. Similarly, there was a significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and intention to hire ( $b = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, *H3* is also supported. However, *H1* has to be rejected as the data did not support the influence of attitude on intention to hire ( $b = 0.08$ ). In addition, Figure 1 shows that 45 percent of the variance in intention to hire PWDs was accounted for by the explanatory constructs.

## 7. Discussion

The current study led to several noteworthy findings. First, the data supported the relationships between subjective norm and perceived behavioral control with intention to hire PWDs. Interestingly, when compared to the other constructs (particularly perceived behavioral control) in the model, subjective norm made the strongest contribution to the variance in intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. This finding is somewhat interesting as it runs contrary to previous findings on the TPB model. In reviewing 185 independent studies using the TPB, Armitage and Conner (2001) concluded that perceived behavioral control generally accounted for significant amounts of variance in intentions and behaviors. Whereas the subjective norm construct was said to be a weaker predictor of intention. Perhaps, in the case of making hiring decisions for PWDs in Malaysia, the collectivistic values of Malaysians are more likely to dictate intentions and behaviors when compared to other factors such as formal policies and guidelines on hiring PWDs. In other words, when Malaysians collectively believe that something needs to be done for PWDs, employers will tend to be more proactive in hiring disabled workers. But first, the non-disabled population must lay to rest their unfounded concerns about PWDs' ability to work and compete in the open market. Next, the maxim that employing PWDs is the way forward for the socio-economic development of the disabled population and ultimately that of the country should be generally subscribed to. Only then Malaysian companies are likely to hire PWDs. In this light, subjective norm concerning hiring PWDs can be regarded as a

mechanism to drive the winds of change in the employment landscape for Malaysians with disabilities.

Second, the finding on the significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and intention to hire PWDs is reasonable given that the respondents were directly involved in making hiring decisions in their own companies. Hence, they would have significant control over factors which can facilitate the hiring of disabled workers, thus resulting in expressed intention to hire them.

Surprisingly, attitude toward hiring Malaysians with disabilities did not significantly influence managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. Some reasons for this finding are in order. First, following Stern's (2000) Attitude-Behavior-Context (ABC) Model, the structure of attitudes is comprised of three components namely affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The affective component involves our feelings/emotions about a particular entity (e.g. I am not comfortable working with PWDs), whereas the behavioral component refers to the way the attitude we have influences how we act or behave (e.g. I will avoid hiring disabled people). Finally, the cognitive component represents our beliefs/knowledge about a particular entity (e.g. I believe PWDs do not have the ability to work and compete in the open market). These three components are typically linked. However, there is evidence that the cognitive and affective components do not always match with behavior has been shown in a study by LaPiere (1934). Stern (2000) claims that there is virtually no link between attitudes and behavioral intention/behaviors when contextual factors are either strongly negative or strongly positive. Contextual factors in the case of this study are plausibly the practice of hiring of Malaysians with disabilities and the ease or difficulty of the hiring process. This study found only 13 out of the 200 organizations sampled had at least one disabled worker, providing some evidence that hiring disabled workers does not appear to be the norm for Malaysian companies. Based on this finding and Stern's (2000) argument, it is reasonable to assume that when hiring PWDs is not a common practice in Malaysian companies, it scarcely matters whether or not managers hold pro-hiring PWDs attitudes.

There is another possible explanation for the insignificant finding on the attitude-intention relationship. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1), attitude represents "[...] a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor." Cheng *et al.* (2006) state that prior to deciding to engage in a certain behavior, a person tends to assess the benefits and costs resulting from the behavior. The chosen action will be one that maximizes the expected net benefits. In calculating the costs and benefits of hiring PWDs, the employers may conclude that the stakes are far too high and as such are not proactive in hiring Malaysians with disabilities. In other words, it would take more than the right attitude to influence intention to hire PWDs than it would to influence intention to, for instance, purchase a product or exercise. Managers may express positive attitudes toward Malaysians with disabilities because of high social desirability but these attitudes seemingly do not get translated in genuine intention to provide jobs to disabled applicants. If this observation is true, then efforts must be intensified to modify employers' attitudes by increasing their understanding of disability and diminishing misconceptions about the inability of Malaysians with disabilities to work and compete in the open market. The same can be said for organizational culture which can positively affect employers' attitudes toward hiring PWDs. But as noted earlier, whether these positive attitudes can eventually translate to increased intention to hire PWDs is dependent upon the managers themselves to activate this link.

## 8. Conclusion, limitations, and future research

Within the PLS-SEM framework, this paper endeavored to investigate the influence of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on managerial intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities. The data supported two of the three hypothesized linkages, suggesting that the TPB framework may require some modification in the context of hiring decisions for Malaysians with disabilities. At the practical level, enhanced knowledge in this area can help to develop public and organizational policies that can better promote and manage the careers of PWDs in Malaysia. Malaysians with disabilities who have jobs will no longer be perceived as a social burden but rather as active and equal participants in the economic development of the community and society at large.

Given that this study is cross-sectional in nature, generalizing the findings must be done with caution. Longitudinal studies may provide further support to the results. Moreover, this is a self-reported survey based on perceptions which may inflate the relationships been studied. Future research could be more experimental in nature so that the results may be better supported.

It is also worthwhile for future studies to examine other potential predictors of intention to hire Malaysians with disabilities such as attributes of PWDs, attributes of employers, organizational culture, and legislation. Finally, the TPB framework could be expanded in future research to include hiring behavior to confirm if behavioral intention of hiring will evidently result in actual hiring of Malaysians with disabilities.

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