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## Research culture of private universities in Malaysia: Using contradictions in activity theory (Article)

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## Abstract

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As a result of the Ministry of Higher Education's strategic and strong thrust to enhance research and innovation in private universities in Malaysia, the work world of professionals in tertiary education has been redefined, with an emphasis on academic research. To get to grips with the dynamics of the changing institutional practices, policies, purposes and new forms of work demanding new skills, tools and resources, Engestrom's activity theory with its focus on change is relevant. Activity Theory affords a gestalt view of and a multi-level analysis from the individual, interactional and collective perspectives. It unpacks interdependencies and relations between subjects, objects, tools, community, rules and division of labor. Activity Theory also discusses issues of power, agency and how systemic changes are shaped by history and culture. Such systemic and multi-faceted changes result in tensions described as 'contradictions' that is a core principle of Activity Theory which explains and potentially creates new forms of development. Data to mirror the changing research culture of four private universities was obtained from semi-structured interviews with 10 academics. The data revealed many contradictions in the research practices of Malaysian private universities; contradictions in the division of labor, rules, norms and traditions, instruments and policies and among communities. Pointing out the central contradictions of the system can prove to be diagnostic as it may chart the situation, recognize the problems and point to possibilities for development. © Universiti Putra Malaysia Press

## Author keywords

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