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KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG ACADEMICIANS: THE ROLE OF THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS

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ABSTRACT

Majority of the organizations invest large part of their resources in enhancing the employees' knowledge, having recognised the importance of knowledge to their establishment. However, it is a challenging task to get those same employees to share their knowledge and experience. Therefore, present study aims to expand the understanding of the influence of the Big-Five personality (BFP) dimensions of an individual's knowledgesharing behaviour. The study has provided evidences that the knowledge sharing behaviour is significantly influenced by the characteristics and personality traits of the individuals. The personality trait within the individual characteristics, is an important psychological factor that guides the individuals' behaviour. The present study has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between personality and knowledge sharing. The study results are significant to guide researchers with hopes that it will enhance their understanding on knowledge sharing in the organizations, particularly the influence of personality trait dimensions on individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour.

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1. Introduction

Organizations are focused to obtain and maintain a competitive advantage through the use of knowledge management. Knowledge management is a practice that finds valuable information and transforms it into necessary knowledge important for decision making and action (Van Beveren, 2002, p. 18). The knowledge related to managing organizations is identified as strategic means for them to improve their performance, become more innovative, gain new markets, and sustain competitive advantage. Human behaviour stands out as a significant variable, across all of the studies on knowledge sharing. Knowledge-sharing behaviour among individuals is influenced by personality trait (Yaakub et al., 2013, p. 13). Fullwood et al. (2013) stated that the field of knowledge sharing is not much investigated in the academic institutions, whilst it has been well-studied in the organizational setting. It is quite imperative for a research to be conducted to investigate the relationship between personality and knowledge-sharing behaviour, considering the importance of individuals in knowledge sharing Today's business environment is a highly competitive environment, which is often characterized by radical changes. Understanding of knowledge management is one of the essential tools for the



survival of many organizations (Wheatley, 2001; Omotayo, 20145). Majority of the researchers acknowledge the important role of knowledge sharing, in the literature concerning knowledge management within an organization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Cummings, 2003; Small & Sage, 2005). Knowledge sharing is one of the knowledge management processes which includes: knowledge creation/ generation, knowledge acquisition, and knowledge codification, is similar to knowledge transfer and use or application of knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Liebowitz & Megbolugbe, 2003). Knowledge sharing is also one of the knowledge processes that constitutes the knowledge life cycle within an organization, specifically the diffusion of knowledge throughout the organization (Birkinshaw & Sheehan, 2002). Additionally, both researchers and practitioners argue that knowledge sharing is an essential part of effective knowledge management (Pan & Scarbrough, 1998; Stewart, 2000; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Woods, 2001; Bock & Kim, 2002; Islamabad, 2002).

In its totality, knowledge management can be broadly defined as any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing, and using knowledge to enhance learning and performance in organizations. De Long and Fahey (2000) defined knowledge as a product of human reflection and experience, considering the unclear distinction between the terms data, information and knowledge. In addition, Alavi and Leidner (2001) refer to knowledge as the inflow of new stimuli that is initiated by human cognitive processes. It may be considered as a whole set of insights, experiences, and procedures that are regarded to be correct and are responsible for guiding the thoughts, behaviours, and communication among the individuals.

Knowledge sharing is a way to enhance the access to knowledge. The more knowledge is shared, the higher the likelihood that there will be more returns from the knowledge and more insight can be developed into it (Ismail and Fakir, 2004). The core aspects of personality are best described by the Big Five Personality (BFP) factors involving extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness confined to personality and individuals' differences. The present study aims to raise the issue that understanding the personality of academics and their knowledge sharing behaviour would be useful for knowledge-based institutions to enter into the debate of examining personality characteristics and knowledge sharing in the academic setting. Inclusion of BFP under the influence of personal factors are modified based on the individual's attitude towards knowledge sharing. The study results are likely to enhance the understanding of the relationship between personality and knowledge sharing. The study's main objective is to investigate the influence of personality trait dimensions on knowledge-sharing behaviour. The study results are significant as it would help the researchers to enhance their understanding of the influence of personality trait dimensions on the individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour.

2. Literature Review

In this section, previous studies on knowledge sharing are examined, followed by a discussion on the big five personality theory which serves as the underpinning theory for this study. A proposed research model is suggested by this study to provide further research direction for future studies, based on the findings of the literature review. Knowledge sharing has been a relatively popular topic for discussion and research by many researchers and practitioners as illustrated by the volume of relevant papers dedicated to the topic (Huysman& de Wit, 2003). Knowledge sharing is one of the core blocks of knowledge management, making it the most important aspect of knowledge management itself. Knowledge sharing is denoted as the edge to create knowledge, which contributes to the increase performance and harnesses innovation among the employees



(Libowitz and Chen, 2001). Knowledge sharing is essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantages for organizations. Indeed, organizations appear to be more productive when they can successfully create an environment in which employees share knowledge and when the knowledge shared is actually used by the recipients of information (Quigley, Tesluk, Locke, & Bartol, 2007). A recent study examined the influence of the BFP dimensions on individual's knowledge sharing behavior (Lotfi et al., 2016). The results showed that personality traits dimension is considered as a significant feature affecting knowledge sharing. There is positive and significant influence of openness to experience, extroversion, and conscientiousness on knowledge sharing behaviour of the individuals. The results also indicated that the most significant factor affecting knowledge sharing behaviour is openness to experience (Lotfi et al., 2016).

2.1 Theoretical Background: The Big Five Personality Theory

The research on the effect of personality traits on the process of knowledge sharing has gained growing popularity in the field of knowledge management. According to Goldberg (1990), virtually all personality measures can be reduced or categorized under the umbrella of a five-factor model of personality. The stability, applicability, and dimensionality of the five factors have been agreed upon by many researchers in the previous studies (McCrae and Costa, 1997; Pulver, Allik, Pulkkinen, and Hamalainen, 1995; Salgado, 1997; Costa and McCrae, 1988, Digman, 1989). It is widely agreed that the big five personality model includes; neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and consciousness. These aspects are considered as mature and stable ways to classify the personality traits, and that it has contributed to a new way of looking at personality (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989).

According to Hough (2015), the big five personality model helps in the prediction of work behaviour across time, contexts, and cultures in different organizational settings. It also postulates the causal relationship between career success and personalities. The five-factor structure serves as a latitude and longitude for personality research; in terms of organizing, harmonizing, and integrating previously disconnected taxonomies and findings (Funder, 2006). Previous studies have introduced a number of theories to explain people's knowledge-sharing behavior and explaining individual behaviours that affect knowledge sharing behavior (Haslamu and Fiske, 1999; Bock and Kim, 2002; Bock et al., 2005; Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005). This present study is explicated from the perspective of the Big Five or Five Factor Model of Personality introduced by McCrae and John (1992).

2.2 Personality trait dimensions and Knowledge Sharing

The effects of individual characteristics such as individual personality on knowledge sharing still remain as one of the important research agendas in this field (Wang and Noe, 2010). This section will examine the relationship between the personality trait dimensions, which are independent variables namely agreeableness, openness, neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness, with knowledge sharing behaviour. Wang et al. (2014) found that extrovert individuals are likely to share their knowledge, no matter they receive the reward or not. The impact of personality traits dimensions on knowledge withholding intentions among university students was examined by Lin and Wang (2012). The students' tendency to decide whether to conceal useful knowledge that would have been beneficial to other students is referred to as knowledge withholding intentions. Social knowledge development in the context of educational or University setting is hindered as a result of knowledge withholding behavior among the students.

One of the personality traits is agreeableness. Knowledge sharing is described as a practice,



where individuals commonly exchange both tacit and explicit knowledge to create new knowledge (Rivera-Vazquez et al, 2009). People will most probably participate in knowledge sharing, since they are very helpful, good natured, and cooperative with others. Their friendly nature can enable them to easily maintain a close relationship with others. However, people with high agreeableness rarely hesitate to share their information, experience, and best practices. Matzler et al. (2008) found that agreeableness has influence on knowledge sharing. The personality dimension is denoted by individuals high in agreeableness, who are helpful, good natured, forgiving, generous, cheerful, courteous, and cooperative (Barrick and Mount 1991).

The next personality trait is neuroticism that encompasses different negative moods such as anxiety, sadness, nervousness, and tension (Benet-Martinez and John, 1998). It is likely that individuals high in neuroticism will not interact and share knowledge with others. The study conducted by Wang and Yang (2007) showed no significant relationship between neuroticism and the intention to share knowledge. According to Gupta (2008) individuals high in neuroticism tend to be anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, worried, and insecure. Therefore, this study suggests that a sense of neuroticism will influence an individual's interaction with other people. Consequently, it can possibly influence their participation in knowledge sharing activities.

Another personality trait is openness to experience. Bozionelos (2004) defined openness as an attitude that encompasses a variety of interests, a tendency to develop novel ideas, flexibility of thought, receptivity of new ideas, and inventiveness. Hsu et al. (2007) suggested that openness will positively influence knowledge sharing. Moreover, the study conducted by Matzler et al. (2008) claimed that individuals high in openness to new experience are more engaged in contributing and seeking knowledge. In the similar context, a recent study has showed that openness to experience is significant predictor of only career identity that is likely to highlight the level of focus among the managers towards their career line (Arora & Rangnekar, 2016). This was similar to another study showing significant impact of personality traits and generalized trust on information-sharing behaviour (Deng et al., 2017). This significantly contributed towards new insights to understand online information-sharing behaviour from the integrated perspective of personality traits.

In the case of extraversion, it is characterized by an individual's tendency to be sociable, assertive, active, bold, energetic, adventuresome, and expressive (Barrick et al., 2002; Malihe et al., 2015). Thus, it can be said that individuals who display high extraversion will participate more in knowledge sharing. De Vrieset et al. (2006) found extraversion to have a positive influence on knowledge sharing. A possible explanation for this finding may be that there is a relationship between extraversion and a need to gain status as suggested by Barrick et al. (2005). Another study showed the development of an integrative understanding of the BFP factors that either support or inhibit individuals' online entertainment knowledge sharing behaviours (Pei-Lee et al., 2017).

Lastly, is the personality trait of conscientiousness. Barrick and Mount (1991) describe the characteristics of individuals with high conscientiousness as being dependable, dutiful, organized, responsible, achievement oriented, and hardworking. Individuals with high conscientiousness will be more willing to participate in knowledge sharing because previous studies have found a relationship between the behaviour and the activity. Existing studies conducted by Matzler et al., (2008) as well as Wang and Yang, (2007) found a significant relationship to knowledge sharing. However, studies conducted by Cabrera et al. (2006) and Teh, et al., (2011) showed that there was no significant relationship between conscientiousness and knowledge sharing. A recent study has also shown that broad and narrow personality traits play significant role in



achieving organizational success through the promotion of knowledge sharing behaviour among the organizations (Anwar, 2017). The relationship between personality and knowledge sharing behavior is mediated by positive and negative effects.

3. Proposed Research Model

This paper attempts to investigate the big five personality which comprises of agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness (independent variable) toward knowledge-sharing behaviour (dependent variable) as shown in Figure 1

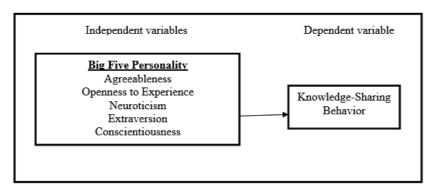


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

4. Proposed Methodology

4.1 Population and Sample

The population for this study will comprise of academicians from three Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Sarawak; namely Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and Politeknik Kuching. Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, lecturers, and tutors were categorized as the academicians in this research. Therefore, the KSB (Knowledge-sharing Behaviour) among academicians is the main concern of this study. The sample unit in this study are the academicians working in the same three Public Institutions of Higher Learning named above located in Sarawak. The respondents of the research will be selected through a sampling method using the procedures of probability sampling. The stratified random sampling (SRS) method was adopted to collect data from the samples, representing all the population's characteristics.

4.2 Data Collection

The study is based mainly on primary data collected from the academicians of Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Sarawak, namely Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS); Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Sarawak branch; and Politeknik Kuching. The total population of academicians in these three public universities in Sarawak is 1524. Based on Krejcie, & Morgan (1970), a representative sample size of this study is seven hundred and ninety-eight. Therefore, a minimum of seven hundred and ninety-eight instruments were examined to ensure content validity and reliability within the target context. A pretest of the questionnaire was performed to assess logical consistencies, ease of understanding, question item sequence adequacy, and context fitness.



4.3 Construct Measurement

The items used to measure knowledge-sharing behaviour as dependent variables were adapted and slightly modified from Ramayah et al (2023). KSBS consists of 25 items measuring four dimensions of knowledge-sharing behaviour, namely written contributions (4 items), organizational communications (8 items), personal interactions (6 items), and communities of practice (7 items) on a 7-point Likert- type response scale in which 1= never, 2= rarely, 3= occasionally, 4= sometimes 5= often, 6= very often and 7= always. Meanwhile, the instrument to measure personality will use a 44-question version of the Big Five inventory based on Costa & McCrae (1990). The test begins with the statement "I see myself as someone who..." and then presents the subject with 44 phrases to complete the sentence. The subject rates each question on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 indicates "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicates "Strongly Agree".

5. Conclusion

The present study has aimed to identify how personality affects knowledge-sharing behaviour among academicians. Knowledge sharing plays a key role in the success of any organization, whether in the public or private sector. Increasing knowledge sharing is not a simple task. To achieve this, there are certain strategies that need to be followed. Those strategies include providing the right kind of motivation, hiring the right personalities, providing the right job characteristics, and perceiving knowledge sharing positively. Personality plays an important role in the predicting a work-related outcome. Different researchers have analyzed the relationship between knowledge sharing behaviour and personality traits, since knowledge sharing is also a performance related outcome, which is part of a work-related outcome. In this regard, the Big Five model of personality traits has been used many times due to its grasp on overall personality traits.

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