In- and extra-role knowledge sharing among information technology professionals: The five-factor model perspective

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1. Introduction

Knowledge is considered one of the most important resources for creating core competitive advantages (Liu & Lai, 2010). Effective use of knowledge can help organizations achieve optimal performance and create successful business strategies in the globalized world. To reach this sort of success, employees must cooperate with and support one another by sharing knowledge, particularly in information technology (IT) companies that rely on teamwork. How to enhance knowledge sharing (KS) among IT professionals is a critical issue for practitioners (IT) companies that rely on teamwork. This study proposes and investigates two types of KS: in- and extra-role. In-role KS is based on role expectations, and extra-role KS extends beyond role expectations. This study also investigates the antecedents and consequences of the two types of KS among information technology (IT) professionals. The five-factor model is applied to build the research model. The results reveal that among IT professionals, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism influence in- or extra-role KS. Unexpectedly, extroversion has no effect on either, indicating the unique behavior of IT professionals compared with others. The study also shows that both in- and extra-role KS have positive effects on team cohesion. Academic and practical implications are provided based on the research findings.

Keywords:
In-role
Extra-role
Knowledge sharing
Personality
Five-factor model
Team cohesion

ABSTRACT

Knowledge is a valuable asset, and knowledge sharing (KS) among employees is particularly important in knowledge-based organizations. This study proposes and investigates two types of KS: in- and extra-role. In-role KS is based on role expectations, and extra-role KS extends beyond role expectations. This study also investigates the antecedents and consequences of the two types of KS among information technology (IT) professionals. The five-factor model is applied to build the research model. The results reveal that among IT professionals, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism influence in- or extra-role KS. Unexpectedly, extroversion has no effect on either, indicating the unique behavior of IT professionals compared with others. The study also shows that both in- and extra-role KS have positive effects on team cohesion. Academic and practical implications are provided based on the research findings.

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This study contributes to the literature by identifying two types of KS and further verifying their differences by investigating the effects of personality on them and their effects on team cohesion among IT professionals. First, this study identifies in- and extra-role KS from a new perspective based on role expectations. The conceptualization and operationalization of in- and extra-role KS in this study are generally applicable to professionals in other contexts. Second, this study is a pioneering investigation into the effects of the five personality traits in the FFM on IT professionals’ in- and extra-role KS, respectively. The literature lacks research conducted in this line. Third, this study examines the effects of in- and extra-role KS on team cohesion. Its investigation of the consequences of the two types of KS not only makes it comprehensive, but also contributes to the team performance literature. Finally, the findings of this study can assist IT managers/team leaders/decision makers in effectively allocating human resources. An enhanced method for assigning collaborative and innovative projects or routine jobs to employees based on their personalities is provided to increase overall job performance. In addition, enhancing extra-role KS is an effective and efficient way to build a cohesive team and then increase its performance accordingly.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Studies of in- and extra-role behavior and the effect of personality on KS are reviewed in the next section. The research model and hypotheses are then developed based on the FFM in the third section. The research method is described in the fourth section, and the data analysis and results are provided. Finally, the implications for practitioners and academics are discussed and conclusions are given.

2. Literature review

2.1. In- and extra-role behavior and knowledge sharing

The distinction between in- and extra-role behavior is well accepted in the management literature. A role refers to “a set of expected behavior patterns attributed to someone occupying a given position in a social unit” (Robbins & Judge, 2016, p. 319). In an organization, a role is basically defined by its job requirements. People have certain expectations of a specific role. The behavior of the person who takes on the role may/may not meet the role expectations or may sometimes be beyond those expectations. Katz (1964) defined in-role behavior as one part of an employee’s work and reflected in the organization’s official salary system. Organ (1988) defined organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as spontaneous behavior that is not clearly established as a part of an employee’s work and reflected in the organization’s official salary system. Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006, p. 33). At the same time, the conceptualization of in- and extra-role behavior was also supported by empirical data (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). Extra-role behavior has been found to affect both individual and organizational performance in organizations (Podsakoff, Blume, Whiting, & Podsakoff, 2009).

Sharing more knowledge than required is considered as one of the dimensions to measure extra-role behavior (Organ, 1988; Smith et al., 1983). Therefore, sharing knowledge required by a job description could be regarded as a type of in-role behavior. In-role KS is bound by job descriptions and role expectations by organizations to ensure effective operation. Employees are generally expected to share knowledge by following certain conventions based on their roles in the organization, such as having regular meetings, reporting progress, and training new employees to make sure the work goes smoothly. Extra-role KS extends beyond job requirements and role expectations in that it contributes to knowledge aggregation that further promotes the effective functioning of the organization rather than being directly or explicitly recognized by a formal system. For example, people may
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