

Impact of Personality of Knowledge Worker on His Work with Knowledge

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Abstract: This study develops, a theoretical framework for the research on impact of personality of knowledge worker on his work with knowledge. Its objective is to expand THE previous researches on knowledge workers, knowledge work and management of knowledge workers. Knowledge workers are major creators of value for their organisations. The major tool and source of their work is their knowledge. Knowledge workers work with both explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge. One of important questions management of knowledge workers raises is what influences the way how knowledge workers work with their knowledge. The hypothesis is that type of personality is important factor that influences how exactly knowledge worker chooses, uses, creates, shares and distributes knowledge. The main research question is: Does the type of personality of knowledge worker influence his style of work with knowledge? If yes how? The methodology used for the review of the literature was, as usual for this type of theoretical research. Researchers collected, described and evaluated different approaches and different ideas on knowledge workers, knowledge and work with it and personality. The data used are secondary data collected from traditional and electronic media. The study pays attention to both historical approaches and the latest approaches in the field. Methods used for the review of the literature include typical methods of theoretical work, e.g., methods that allow interlinking separated pieces of knowledge like analysis and synthesis, comparison, induction, deduction, abstraction, generalisation and critical thinking.

Key words: Knowledge worker, knowledge, knowledge dimensions, work with knowledge, personality

INTRODUCTION

These days, tangible assets (especially in technically demanding sectors) are commonly available and even may be a basic prerequisite of doing business. In such an environment knowledge is a critical asset and success factor. The importance of knowledge for the world has grown, so much that our society can be called a knowledge or even creative society. In knowledge societies all spheres of human life depend on the ability of people to create, distribute, share and use knowledge (Mladkova, 2012). People who work with knowledge are called knowledge workers. They are generally said people whose major working tool and asset is knowledge. Knowledge workers are major creators of value for their organisations. Knowledge workers work with both explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge. One of important questions management of knowledge workers raises is what influences the way how knowledge workers work with their knowledge.

Knowledge consists of 2 dimensions, explicit and tacit. Explicit dimension is encoded in organisational formal models, rules, documents, drawings, products, services, facilities, systems and processes and is easily communicated externally (Vail, 1999; Al-Ghassani *et al.*, 2006). Tacit knowledge is stored in peoples brains, as mental models, experiences and skills and is difficult to

communicate externally (Vail, 1999). The tacit dimension is related to practical activity; it is highly personal, partly or fully subconscious. It cannot be separated from its human owner. Due to tacit knowledge, knowledge as a whole is intangible (Mladkova, 2012). The way how knowledge worker works with knowledge depends on many factors. The type of work (job) he is doing is probably the most important. Some jobs are more explicit, some more tacit knowledge demanding. Another important aspect is a culture. It is widely known that people in Europe, North America and Australia understand knowledge as primarily explicit though people in Asia understand knowledge as primarily tacit. Also, personality may influence the work with knowledge remarkably.

This study develops, a theoretical framework for researches on the link between the personality of knowledge worker and his style of work with knowledge. Researchers will use this study in the research, as a theoretical and methodological background. The main research questions are: Does the personality of knowledge worker influence the way how he works with knowledge? If yes, what is the impact of personality on individual phases of work with knowledge (acquisition, creation, sharing)? The theoretical framework is based on the current knowledge from a literature review and researchers experiences and academic work. The study is

about the state of the art of the link between knowledge worker's personality and his style of work. The study presents a general alignment of the definitions, concepts and approaches related with the topic.

The research on the relation between knowledge worker's personality and his style of work with knowledge is the continuation of the previous researches on knowledge, knowledge work and management of knowledge workers.

Review of literature: The topic impact of personality of knowledge worker on his work with knowledge is an interdisciplinary topic that requires review of literature in following fields; knowledge, knowledge workers, work with knowledge, personality, the link between the personality and work with knowledge.

There are many approaches and definitions of knowledge in literature. Tobin (1996) understands knowledge, as information plus intuition and experience. Wolf (1990) sees knowledge as organised information used for problem solving. Turban and Frenzel (1992) writes that knowledge is information that is organised and analysed to become legible and usable for problem solution and decision making. Veber (2004) defines knowledge, as a changing system with interactions among experience, skills, facts, relations, values, thinking processes and meanings. Kanter (1999) says knowledge is information with context that provides the basis for actions and decision making. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) define knowledge as justified true belief. Beckman (1997) writes that knowledge is information plus choice, experience, principles, limitations and learning. For Wiig (1993) knowledge is the body of understandings, generalisations and abstractions that we carry with us on a permanent or semi-permanent basis and apply to interpret and manage the world around us. Van der Spek and Spijkervet (1997) understand knowledge as a set of insight, experiences and procedures that are considered correct and true and that therefore guide the thought, behaviour and communication of people. Brinkley (2008) thinks knowledge empowers actors with the capacity for intellectual or physical activity. Knowledge is a matter of cognitive capability and enables actors to do and reflect (Mladkova, 2012).

Knowledge can be classified into different groups. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) offer classification into 3 types of knowledge; explicit (transferable to data), implicit (hidden subconscious that can be transformed to data) and tacit (hidden in the heads of people, not transferable to data). They see knowledge, as created and expanded through interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Spender (1995, 1996) offers a

classification to an individual (owned by an individual) and a collective (owned by a group) knowledge. Spender (1995, 1996), also identifies different types of knowledge used in organisations; conscious knowledge (explicit knowledge held by the individual), objectified knowledge (explicit knowledge held by the organisation), automatic knowledge (preconscious individual knowledge), collective knowledge (context dependent knowledge visible in the practice of the organisation) (Mladkova, 2012).

The classification to explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge is simple but easy to use in models. It is also easy to explain to people in practical life. Explicit knowledge is encoded in organisational formal models, rules, documents, drawings, products, services, facilities, systems and processes and is easily communicated externally (Vail, 1999; Al-Ghassani *et al.*, 2006). Tacit knowledge is stored in peoples brains as mental models, experiences and skills and is difficult to communicate externally (Vail, 1999). It is highly personal, often subconscious. It is the dimension responsible for practical activities.

As for knowledge workers, many different approaches and ideas can be found in the literature. Knowledge workers are often highly regarded by employers for their innovation and creativity, as these are both considered important elements in an organisation's ability to survive and prosper in an increasingly competitive and fast-changing environment. In private industry, innovation and creativity are needed to bring new or improved products and services to the market while there is a greater need for public sector employees to be innovative and creative, as the government seeks significant improvements and change in the delivery of public services (Brinkley *et al.*, 2009). The literature review on knowledge workers offers 3 basic approaches to this term (Brinkley *et al.*, 2009) conceptual approaches, data (industry) driven approaches and job content approaches. Conceptual approaches explain the term knowledge worker from the point of view of employees importance for an organisation and his style of work with knowledge. Researchers who can be classified to conceptual approaches are Drucker (1954), Vinson, Lowe (2002), Davenport (2005) and Reboul.

Data driven approaches see knowledge workers, as all those who work in particular organisations or in particular sectors or institutions. Representatives of this approach are, for example Sveiby (1997) and Alvesson (1995).

Job content approaches see knowledge workers, as people who do a certain type of job. This approach can be identified in the research of Toffler (1990), Reich (1992), Kidd (1994) and Nomikos (1989).

The work with knowledge consists of 3 basic phases; acquisition, creation and sharing (distribution). All phases of work with knowledge can happen on different levels; individual, group, organisation and inter-organisational level (Mladkova, 2012). In the research, researchers will stick to the individual level.

Knowledge acquisition is process of learning. There are many concepts of learning in the literature, for example single and double loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978), Kolb (1984)'s experiential learning theory, Neil Fleming's VAK/VARK Model. Acquisition of knowledge is also partly covered by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)'s concept of SECI.

Knowledge creation is explained, for example by SECI Model by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Ackoff (1989)'s approach, Boisot (1999)'s I-Space Model, conceptual framework of knowledge management processes by Bouthillier and Shearer (2002), the model of Wiig (1997).

Knowledge sharing is paid attention in Boisot (1999)'s I-Space Model, conceptual framework of Bouthillier and Shearer (2002) and in SECI Model by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995).

All 3 processes of work with knowledge and the creation of knowledge can happen simultaneously or it appears, so because the human brain can work very efficiently and quickly. That is why, researchers of models of knowledge acquisition and creation give the earlier processes different priorities and order (Mladkova, 2012).

Personality is the dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations and behaviours in various situations. It can also be thought of, as a psychological construct a complex abstraction that encompasses the person's unique genetic background (except in the case of identical twins) and learning history and the ways in which these factors influence his or her responses to various environments or situations (Ryckman, 2007). By Sullivan (1953) personality is a pattern, repeating in interpersonal situations. By Drapela personality is a dynamic source of behavior, identity and uniqueness of every person. Behavior means thinking processes, emotions, decision making, physical activities, social interactions, etc. Personality is a pattern, repeating in interpersonal situations. Cattell (1950) thinks that personality is trait that helps to predict behavior of human. In Oxford dictionary personality is defined, as the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive character.

There are many different theories of personality available in the literature. From the Hippocrates humors

theory, later used by Galen for his 4 temperament theory to theories of 19th and 20th century. This study does not give space for detailed description of individual theories but let's list at least some of them. By Drapela, the most important are the psycho-analogical theory (S. Freud), analytical theory (K.G. Jung), individual psychology (A. Adler), interpersonal theory (K. Horney, H.S. Sullivan), social-psychologic theories (E. From, E. Ericson), Dolard's and Miller's theory of learning, trait and factor theory (R.B. Cattell), field theory (K. Lewin), systemic eclectics (G.W. Allport), I theory (C. Rogers), holistic theory (K. Goldstein, A. Maslow), logotherapy (V. Frankl).

Many of upper theories were developed for and are used in psychology and clinical psychiatry. In business and management following classification are popular: Jung's classification to extrovert and introvert, Jung based Eysenck (1947)'s classification to choleric, melancholic, sanguinic and phlegmatic types (Eysenck and Wilson, 1976), very popular is Myers and Myers (1980) and Big Five inventory (John and Srivastava, 1999) that works with 5 dimensions; neuroticism (versus emotional stability), extraversion (versus introversion), openness to experience (versus closeness to experience), agreeableness (versus rudeness) and conscientiousness (versus non dependability).

Interesting options for management brings classification called Enneagram. Enneagram is a dynamic system that evaluates behaviour of individual based on 9 basic types, wings (relation between types that are neighbours to each other), stress and happiness lines (relations between types that reflect happiness and well-being of the person), levels of development and so called subtypes. Enneagram allow us to work with person based on his current situation.

The review of literature on the topic of link between the personality and work with knowledge brought limited results as only three works were identified. All 3 of them took into account only knowledge sharing phase of work with knowledge. Amayah makes the literature review on knowledge sharing, personality traits and diversity. She mentions researches where knowledge sharing was analysed based on Big Five inventory tool (John and Srivastava, 1999). As for diversity she focused on researches on relationship between culture and demographic characteristics, such as gender and knowledge sharing. Morgeson *et al.* (2005), examines the relation between the personality and knowledge sharing also on Big Five inventory tool (John and Srivastava, 1999). The 3rd work is the master thesis from Copenhagen Business School. The thesis covers the problematic of knowledge sharing by different enneagram types. The research is built on action research methodology and it

does not cover all types offered by Enneagram classification (Raducanu, 2012). The review of literature shows great opportunities for the research in the chosen field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main research questions are: Does the personality of knowledge worker influence the way how he works with knowledge? If yes, what is the impact of personality on individual phases of work with knowledge (acquisition, creation, sharing)? The hypotheses of research are following:

- H₁: The personality of knowledge worker influences the way how he works with knowledge
- H₂: Different types of personality have different strengths and weaknesses for individual phases of work with knowledge

The research is divided into 2 phases, theoretical review of literature and empirical research. The review of literature covers topics of knowledge, knowledge workers, work with knowledge, personality, the link between the personality and work with knowledge. Due to the fact that the research is an interdisciplinary research the review of literature is not, as deep as it would be if only one of given topics were explored. The methodology used for the review of the literature was as usual for this type of theoretical research. Researchers collected described and evaluated different approaches and ideas on chosen topics. The data used are secondary data collected from traditional and electronic media. The review pays attention to both historical and the latest approaches in the field. Methods used for the review of the literature include typical methods of theoretical work, e.g., methods that allow interlinking separated pieces of knowledge like analysis and synthesis, comparison, induction, deduction, abstraction, generalisation and critical thinking.

From the review of literature (theoretical part of the research), researchers chose following approaches and concepts as a background for the further research. Knowledge is understood, as defined by Veber (2004). Researchers will use basic classification to 2 dimensions of knowledge (explicit and tacit) by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). It is the simple concept with big practical impact and helps to explain the phase of knowledge creation (SECI Model). As for knowledge workers, the conceptual approach serves the best the purpose of the research.

The personality of respondents of the research will be evaluated by Enneagram classification of types. The

basic description of types will be used (the attention will not be paid to other tools of the Enneagram system). Researchers decided for Enneagram because its typology is detailed and sophisticated and enables to capture important differences between knowledge workers and their behaviour. The 2nd reason why Enneagram was chosen is the long very good experience with this tool.

The 1st phase of the work with knowledge, knowledge acquisition will be based on Neil Fleming's VAK/VARK Model. For both the personality type and the type of learning, respondents will be asked to test themselves.

The part of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing will be based on Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)'s concept of SECI. Researchers will examine which processes of SECI respondents prefer when creating knowledge (processes based on explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge or combination of both). As for knowledge sharing researchers will examine how respondents prefer to share knowledge, if in tacit or explicit dimension and by which tools.

Empirical research will be based on a questionnaire. Questions will be constructed as closed questions. Some of the closed questions will offer the option of commentary. Respondents will complete the questionnaire without the supervision of researchers. Questions are constructed, so that they did not indicate what may be a correct answer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is a theoretical background for the research on the relation between the personality of knowledge worker and the way how he works with knowledge. This research is continuation of the previous researches on knowledge, knowledge work and management of knowledge workers. The study allowed us to make the review of literature in important topics that are the foundation of this interdisciplinary research; knowledge, knowledge workers, work with knowledge, personality, the link between the personality and work with knowledge. It gave us chance to clarify research objectives and hypotheses and decide on which approaches and concepts we will use for the empiric research.

Researchers hope that the research will disclose the differences in work with knowledge between types of personalities. It will have both theoretical and practical contribution. As for the theory, it will describe the field with high potential for research. There are not many works on this topic in the literature. As for practical contribution

the research may give us new ideas on how to choose right people for different knowledge jobs, new ideas on how to manage and develop knowledge workers, new ideas on how to create teams.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the whole research is to improve the knowledge on important group of employees, knowledge workers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was financially supported by IP300040, grant Innovation and Management, FPH VSE v Praze.

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