Assessing Hotel Employees' Knowledge Sharing Attitude and Behavior: Personality Traits Perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between employees' personality traits and their knowledge sharing (KS) attitude and behavior. A questionnaire was developed and completed by 368 hotel employees working in the five star hotels in Cairo. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between hotel employees KS attitude, behavior and just two aspects of personality traits, namely agreeableness and conscientiousness. Also, there were significant positive relationships between openness to experience and both of knowledge collecting behavior and overall KS behavior. These results might extend existing literature on knowledge management and present empirical evidence on the personal dispositions which may affect knowledge sharing.

Key words: Knowledge Sharing, Personality Traits, Hotel Industry

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Introduction

Knowledge is one of the most important resources for all organizations. Knowledge is defined as comprehension or awareness in the form of belief and judgment, accomplished through learning or experience (Davenport *et al.,* 1998). Knowledge can be seen as a strategic resource of organizations (Naim and Lenkla, 2016), and a precious intangible asset (Badaracco, 1991) which is the fundamental driver of the value of the firm (Bock et al., 2005; Suppiah and Sandhu, 2011). Moreover, it is a potential source of competitive advantage because its uniqueness, scarce, path dependent and hard to be imitated or substituted by others (Nanda, 1996). Thus, knowing how to leverage knowledge resources to develop strategic plans for business is one of the critical factors for sustainable competitive advantage (Kim and Lee, 2013).

Furthermore, Nonaka *et al.* (2000) argued that knowledge-based theories mostly posit that integrating knowledge must be the substantial goal of every firm. Knowledge is like the organizational gears which need to be lubricated through its sharing among employees. It is one of the most important resources that enable individuals or organizations to conduct right actions in a right manner (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Therefore, there is a need for individuals and organizations to foster knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing (KS) is a phenomenon which may trigger the feelings of conflict of interest among the individuals (Von Krogh, 1998). Individuals may vary in their KS behaviors (Bt Dahari *et al.*, 2015). Some people have a real desire to share knowledge with others, while other people seem unconcerned. KS takes place at individual levels and organizational levels as well (Kim and Lee, 2013); thus, individual characteristics might influence such a process. If employees' unwillingness to share knowledge with peers continues, it is very probable that this may be part of their personality (Osman *et al.*, 2015). Factors promoting or hindering employee KS within groups and organizations therefore create an important area in research and, specifically, understanding their mechanism is a cornerstone for managerial success in the hospitality industry (Kim and Lee, 2012). Often employees refuse to share their knowledge; they feel uneasiness in doing so because this may reduce their opportunities for promotion or because doing so might be uncompensated effort (Bock *et al.*, 2005).

Studies exploring the effect of employees' personality on their KS attitude or behavior within the Egyptian hotel industry seem to be scarce. Eventually, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between employees' personality traits and their KS attitude and behavior.

Literature

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing takes place when an individual is willing to share and obtain knowledge from others (Naim and Lenkla, 2016). KS is the process of sharing pertinent information, suggestions, ideas, and experience with others (Bartol and Abhishek, 2002), in addition, transforming knowledge and creating new knowledge (Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004). It also involves sharing of values such as acting ethically (Tuan, 2015). In other words, KS is a knowledge conversion process from the individuals to organizations (Foss *et al.,* 2010).

There are two types of KS behaviors, namely, knowledge donating and knowledge collecting (Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004). Knowledge donating is about communicating to others what an individual knows (source of knowledge), whereas, knowledge collecting is about consulting with colleagues to learn from them to develop new capabilities (recipient of knowledge). Although both types have different natures, they are active ones; actively communicating to others what one knows and actively consulting others in order to learn what they know (Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004). That is, with knowledge collecting behavior, individuals call for knowledge from each other in order to get intellectual capital, while with knowledge donating behavior, individuals are motivated to pass on their own intellectual capital to others (Kim and Lee, 2013).

Personality Traits

Personality can be defined as a set of characteristics, each corresponding to a trait, resulting in a unique profile, featuring one person from others (Pervin, 1989). Personality is distinguished and enduring psychological qualities that determine individuals' feelings, thought, attitude, and behavior (McCrae, 2009; Pervin and Cervone, 2010).

Early studies have conducted to identify the major traits that govern behavior. For example, Berkeley researchers in California University, and Block and Block studied personality using California Q-sort; the four scales on the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) that measure extraversion, feeling, judging, and intuition; and the 20 scales based on the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) measuring folk concepts such as capacity for status, self-control, wellbeing, tolerance, and achievement via independence. After decades of research, it has been achieved a general taxonomy of personality traits, the "Big Five" personality dimensions (John *et al.,* 2008; Yang and Hwang, 2014).

The Big Five-Factor (BFF) model of personality is a widely accepted and valid framework of personality that is greatly used in researches; it helps in predicting behavior at the workplace (Gupta, 2008). This model introduces five basic dimensions that underlie all others and comprise most of the significant variations in human personalities. These factors are: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience.

Extraversion is characterized by positive feelings and experiences and hence can be seen as a positive effect (Clark and Watson, 1991), dominant, self-confident, and active and excitement seeking (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Extraverted people have the attributes of: sprightliness, warmth, predominance of empathy (Hadzic and Nedeljkovic, 2009), and this explains the degree to which those persons are communicative, they indeed became satisfied with relations towards others (Jovičić *et al.*, 2011). In contrast, those who are low in extraversion (introverted) are unsociable, reserved, shy, submissive, quiet, and inhibited people (Gupta, 2008). They are less prone or motivated to enter the social interaction (Petkovic et al, 2005).

Agreeableness is a personality facet. People of such personality are cooperative, tolerant, helpful, generous and trusted (Witt *et al.*, 2002). They are in fact selfless and sympathetic, and in return, they believe the same from others to be equally helpful (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). They are not likely to be aggressive, rude, or thoughtless (Borges, 2013).

Conscientiousness is about being responsible, dependable, accurate, persistent, diligent, and work-oriented (Borges, 2013). A conscientious person has attributes of perfectionism, respect for rules, planning and executing tasks in systematic manner, hardness and conformity (Hadzic and Nedeljkovic, 2009).

Nevertheless, those persons have reliability and confidentiality on the one side, and uncertainty and distrust on the far side (Petkovic *et al.*, 2005).

Neuroticism demonstrates the personality facet that defines those individuals of anxious, unstable, restless, troubled, nervous, worried, and unsecured (Gupta, 2008). It is the general tendency to experience such negative effects of fear, sorrow, anger, confusion, guilt and disgust (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003).

Openness to Experience describes those persons having the attributes of imagination, creativity, curiousity and the sense of artistic (McCrae and John, 1992). Besides, those persons are cultured, broad-minded, self-sufficient, and have a tendency to risk, (Borges, 2013). Individuals with a high level of openness display a positive attitude towards learning and having new experiences because they have flexible thinking, and thus, valuing new ideas and perspectives (Matzler *et al.*, 2008). However, a person that does not possess this feature is reserved, discreet, conventional, conservative, unimaginative, and has aversion to risk (Petkovic *et al.*, 2005 and Jovičić *et al.*, 2011).

Knowledge Sharing and Personality Traits

The quality of service in hotels can be improved through enhancing employees' knowledge about consumers' preferences and desires. Also, in hospitality businesses it is important to clearly understand how knowledge is best shared and how much of it may be shared, thereby to improve performance.

Hotel employees ought to be aware of coordination and joint ''creative thinking'' that are vital to achieve an increased customer satisfaction and service quality (Bouncken, 2005). Riege (2005) argued that KS represents the backbone of many organizations. In the hospitality and tourism industry, study of KS has gained more attention, because the sharing of knowledge can reinforce employees' innovative behaviors (Kim and Lee, 2013), facilitates the development of new services (Monica Hu *et al.*, 2009), enhances service quality (Bouncken, 2002), supports the ability to meet customers' diverse and rapidly changing demands (Kim and Lee, 2013), and thereby ensures effective organizational performance (Kim *et al.*, 2013). KS is needed to convert general ideas and concepts into products and services and as well as for innovation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Thus the ability of converting the individual knowledge into organizational knowledge significantly participates in enhancing the organizational performance (Argote *et al.*, 2000).

The question now is what makes employees willing or unwilling to share their knowledge? Awad and Ghaziri (2004) stated that personality is one of the factors that control knowledge sharing. An individual's personality is critical when it comes to KS. It can influence that individual to share or hoard his/her knowledge.

Studies found that the extraversion trait of employees has a positive influence on their KS due to sociable, energetic and confidence characteristics they have (DeVries *et al.*, 2006; Ferguson *et al.*, 2010). Employees exhibiting extraversion should have the social skills and ability to work and interact with others. These skills are necessary to be involved in KS (Agyemang *et al.*, 2016). Extraverts resort to share knowledge whether they being considered and recompensed for it (Wang *et al.*, 2014). Contrary to the view of Wang *et al.* (2014), there may be a relationship between extraversion and the need to gain status, that represent a motivating factor for KS (Ardichvili, 2008). Finally, when employees are less extraverted, then knowledge sharing amongst them would be roughly obstructed and ineffective.

Studies have confirmed that individuals who scored high on the agreeableness scale were more likely to share knowledge than those of lower scores (DeVries *et al.*, 2006; Gupta, 2008; Matzler *et al.*, 2008; Matzler *et al.*, 2011). Dzandu *et al.* (2014) argued that knowledge sharing thrives well in an environment dominated by mutual respect, trust and reciprocal determinism. Matzler *et al.* (2008) added that KS is a particular form of workplace helpfulness, co-operation, and collaboration and necessitates 'getting along with others' within interpersonal relationships with other employees and supervisors. All in all, behaviors directly bounded to aspects of agreeableness that is argued to be a strong predictor of helping behaviour like as KS behavior (Agyemang *et al.*, 2016).

An important relationship was argued between conscientiousness and KS as when persistent, responsible, and hard-working employees perceive that the dissemination of knowledge will be an aspect of their duties, they tend to do what is expected from them (Cho *et al.*, 2007). In addition, KS is a form of organizational citizenship that entails submissive respect to organizational interests and group principles

(especially over self-interest and personal goals), which are also essence features of conscientiousness. Thus, employees with high levels of conscientiousness are more willing to engage into and interact with KS concept (Matzler *et al.*, 2008).

High self-confidence and low anxiety levels are important characteristics of neuroticism. They enable individuals simply to engage in KS behavior. Those characteristics also help human interaction be facilitated, as self-confident employees are less threatened by competition. Furthermore, those individuals that have low levels of anxiety are more likely to successfully deal with situations, involve the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, which usually entails longanimity and sympathy (Borges, 2013). In contrast, when experiencing negative emotions, individuals will be less likely to interact and/or engage in KS activities (Raducanu, 2012).

Studies acknowledged that openness to experience is positively related to individual's KS behavior (Matzler *et al.*, 2008), because openness to experience is a repercussion of a person's inquisitiveness and ingenuity which in turn represent the predictors of seeking other individuals' insights (Cabrera *et al.*, 2006), hence, a strong predictor for KS (Raducanu, 2012). In their research, Constant *et al.* (1996) proposed that higher levels of expertise are more likely to give a useful advice, and less likely to contribute when considering the expertise to be inadequate (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). Also, when people seemed to be openness, they will be more engaged contributing and seeking of knowledge (Matzler *et al.*, 2008). Matzler and Müller (2011) assured that openness to experience as one of the five personality traits is the most potent predictor of KS.

Eventually, studying personality in organizational behavior is an important issue because it impacts employees' knowledge sharing process which in turn influences the work outcomes. Lack of studies in hotel industry in Egyptian context makes this study an important attempt, in particular with, personalities can, as we are humans, change over time. Expanding on the theoretical discussion and objectives of the study, a conceptual model was developed as shown in the below figure to illustrate how employees' personality traits influence their knowledge sharing attitude and behavior; knowledge collecting donating behavior.
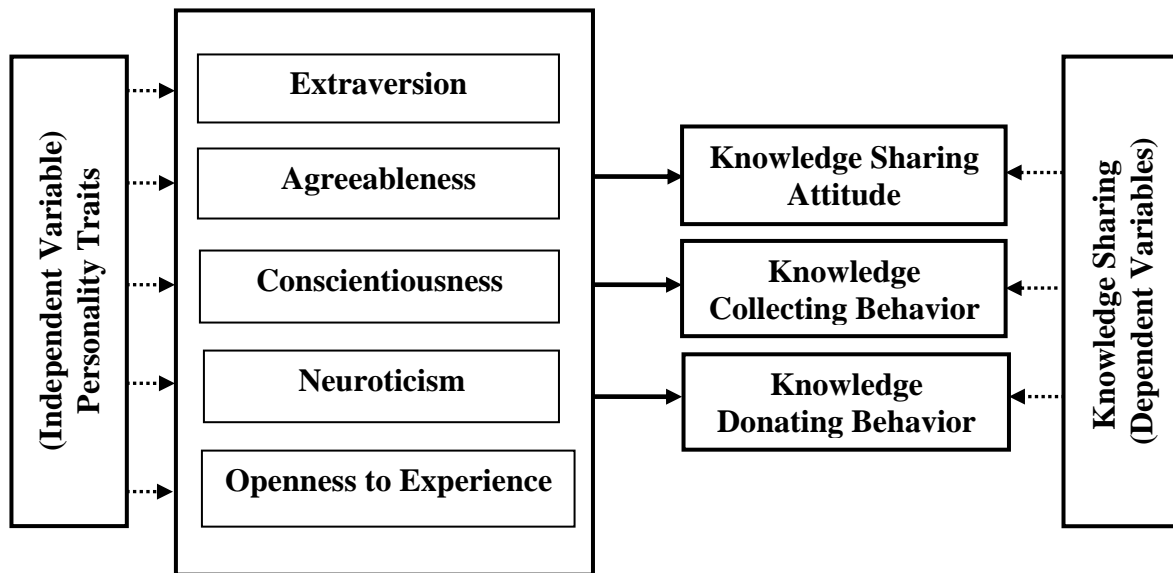
A Conceptual model of the study

Methodology

A random sample of 450 employees was chosen for the investigation. Data were collected from 15 five star hotels located in Cairo, from April to June 2016. This hotel setting was chosen for two reasons. *First*, according to the Egyptian Hotel Association (2015) 35.3% of total room capacity is in this hotel category and this reflects how is the size of operations that need to be studied for improvement. *Second*, it is believed that employees working in may be more knowledgeable due to hotel's training and development programs offered. Three hundred sixty eight (368) correctly filled questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 81.7%. This sample size is appropriate for conducting a regression analysis, since the sample size exceeds 50 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001; Kim and Lee, 2013; Agyemang *et al.*, 2016).

Previous reliable and valid measurement scales were adopted to measure the constructs. Four-item scale was used to measure employees' KS attitude (Sohail and Daud, 2009). Five-item scale used to measure knowledge donating behavior, and another four-item scale was used to measure knowledge collecting behavior, both are adapted from Kim and Lee (2013), Jamal and Mat (2014) and Abdul Mannan *et al.* (2015). To measure employees' personality, a thirty-item scale adapted from Matzler *et al.* (2008) and Teh *et al.* (2011) was used. Each of the five personalities was measured through six statements.

Then, all scale items were originally prepared in English and then translated into Arabic using the back-translation method. After that, the first draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by two academic experts. They were asked to provide us with their feedback based on the wording, clarity, and to what extent the questionnaire is measuring what it is supposed to measure. Their comments indicated the ambiguity of some statements. Appropriate modifications have been carried out. The second draft was piloted to 15 employees in order to identify any deficiencies with layout and to investigate the level of comprehension of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was distributed to collect data for final analysis. The survey was conducted to investigate employees' KS attitude, employees' KS behavior, and employees' personality. All responses were collected through a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Results

Reliability of the Study Instrument

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability was computed to determine the internal consistency of the scale and the tests showed that the reliability coefficient was 0.71 which is considered acceptable in most social science research situations (Ingram, 2009) and indicates that the instrument is reliable for use.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations for each of the measures are displayed (see the table) The descriptive statistics showed that mean scores for knowledge attitude, knowledge donating, knowledge collecting, and overall-KS behavior were 4.17, 4.05, 4.03 and 4.04, respectively. This means that the employees have high perception of knowledge sharing. Regarding personality traits, the results of mean scores reported differences among them; the dominating trait was openness to experience (Mean = 4.06, SD = 0.653); neuroticism was the least perceived trait (Mean = 2.95, SD = 0.386). And all the remaining traits (conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness) showed quite moderate figures.

Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations of Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. KS Attitude	-								
2. Knowledge donating behavior	0.45(**)	-							
3. Knowledge collecting behavior	0.40(**)	0.60(**)	-						
4. Overall KS behavior	0.48(**)	0.90(**)	0.87(**)	-					
5. Extraversion	0.16(**)	0.09	0.21(**)	0.16(**)	-				
6. Agreeableness	0.29(**)	0.30(**)	0.48(**)	0.43(**)	0.26(**)	-			
7. Conscientiousness	0.30(**)	0.46(**)	0.44(**)	0.49(**)	0.22(**)	0.29(**)	-		
8. Neuroticism	0.28(**)	0.00	0.09	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.19(**)	-	
9. Openness to Experience	0.18(**)	0.21(**)	0.36(**)	0.30(**)	0.28(**)	0.04	0.00	0.11(*)	-
Mean	4.17	4.05	4.03	4.04	3.53	3.19	3.61	2.95	4.06
No.	368	368	368	368	368	368	368	368	368
Standard Deviation	.996	.749	.842	.730	.553	.661	0.406	0.386	0.653

(**)The correlation is significant at (0.05).

The high perception of employee knowledge sharing in the current study may be related to the nature of hotel environment. Bardi (2003) claimed that hotel industry has its own nature that the interdepartmental communications must be maintained within the hotel. Guest needs are met when employees cooperate and communicate to provide hotel services. Hotel managers must take an objective view of these communications, considering the needs of the guest, the actions of the employees, and the policies and procedures in effect. In addition, each employee must develop an appreciation for the jobs of other departmental employees to promote an understanding of how each employee's activities affect the delivery of hospitality. Well-developed operational policies and training programs will assist employees in communicating within a department and between departments. Moreover, hotels which adopts for instance total quality management technique focuses on ways everyone can work together to discuss issues and problems and resolve them as a team. Therefore, the heart of such effective interdepartmental communications is acting knowledge sharing behavior.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

The results in the table showed a significant positive correlation between employees KS attitude, KS behavior and just two aspects of personality traits (namely, agreeableness and conscientiousness). For agreeableness with KS attitude (r=0.29 and p<0.05); with Knowledge donating behavior (r=0.30, p<0.05); with knowledge collecting behavior (r=0.48, p<0.05); and with the overall KS behavior (r=0.43, p<0.05). For conscientiousness with KS attitude (r=0.30, p<0.05); with Knowledge donating behavior (r=0.46, p<0.05); with knowledge collecting behavior (r=0.44, p<0.05); and with the overall KS behavior (r=0.49, p<0.05). In addition, a significant correlation exists between openness to experience and knowledge collecting behavior (r=0.36, p<0.05), and the overall KS behavior (r=0.30, p<0.05).

A simple regression was conducted to investigate the relationship between personality traits and the KS. The results indicated that employees' conscientiousness personality explains 15.7% of variance in knowledge donating behavior and 12.2% of variance in the overall KS. Moreover, agreeableness and openness to experience have a slight effect on KS dimensions. However, it could be viewed as a weak model, considering the fact that there are other factors that can contribute to the total variance.

Discussion

The results of this study indicated a positive correlation between agreeableness and employees' KS, this supports the findings of previous studies which reported that individuals who scored high on the agreeableness scale were more likely to share knowledge than those who had lower scores (Gupta, 2008; Matzler *et al.*, 2008; Matzler *et al.*, 2011; Agyemang *et al.* 2016). Matzler *et al.* (2008) argued that KS is a particular form of workplace helpfulness, co-operation, and collaboration and necessitates 'getting along with others' within interpersonal relationships with other employees and supervisors. Dzandu *et al.* (2014) added that KS thrives well in an environment dominated by mutual respect, trust and reciprocal determinism. Previous studies found that agreeable individuals are altruistic, sympathetic, and eager to help others, and to strive for cooperation rather than competition (Liao and Chuang, 2004). Hence, agreeableness involves getting along with others in pleasant, satisfying relationships (Organ and Lingl, 1995). All in all, behaviors directly bounded to aspects of agreeableness that is argued to be a strong predictor of helping behaviour like as KS behavior (Agyemang *et al.*, 2016).

In addition, the findings of this study confirm those indicated by Cabrera *et al.* (2006) , Cho *et al.* (2007) and Matzler *et al.* (2008) that employees with high levels of conscientiousness are more willing to engage into the effort to document their knowledge in order to share it with others. Highly conscientious people are responsible, persistent, hard-working achievement-oriented, self-motivated and task-oriented individuals (Gupta, 2008). Hence, they are supposed to perform better at work, focusing to the work tasks and taking initiative in solving problems (Witt *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, they tend to engage in activities that are beyond their role and responsibilities; consequently, they are expected to be more willing to share knowledge (Gupta, 2008; Matzler *et al.*, 2011; Raducanu, 2012). They perceive that the dissemination of knowledge is part of their duties.

Moreover, the result of this study seems to agree with the findings of Cabrera *et al.* (2006) and Matzler *et al.* (2008), that there is a positive correlation between KS and openness to experience trait. Previous studies have shown that openness predicts learning and expertise (Cabrera *et al.*, 2006). Individuals with a high level of openness have flexible thinking, thus valuing new ideas and perspectives (Matzler *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, they display a positive attitude towards learning and experiencing new things. As a result, Cabrera *et al.* (2006) argued that openness, as "a reflection of an individual's curiosity and originality, could be a predictor of seeking other's people insights", hence a robust predictor for knowledge sharing (Raducanu, 2012). However, the results of the current study were different from the results of previous studies (e.g. DeVries *et al.*, 2006; Ferguson *et al.*, 2010; Agyemang *et al.*, 2016) which found a positive influence on knowledge sharing by extraversion trait.

To sum up, despite the high level of employees' perception of the KS, personality traits might not have a serious effect on this KS. This may be due to the nature of hotel environment that imposes employees to follow specific standards while rendering the hotel services.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the role of the different personality traits of hotel employees on the KS. The findings indicated a high perception of KS among hotel employees. Also, the findings revealed a significant positive moderate relationship between knowledge sharing and some aspects of personality traits; namely, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.

Interaction, socialization and employees' collaboration efforts are encouraged/not encouraged according to the service management standards so that KS can be affected. In other words, hotels often employ staff not to work in accordance with this personality, but to act out their specified roles. Even though, personality traits can contribute to effective role performance.

These findings may help hotels develop specific strategies to improve knowledge management systems and properly assign different roles for hotel employees. The findings can also help managers understand the importance of such soft elements as personality traits and knowledge sharing. Hotel management should select candidates applying for positions "via personnel screening" whose personal traits are agreeableness and conscientiousness to maintain a high level of knowledge sharing.

Eventually, this empirical investigation may contribute to the existing knowledge base. It would be interesting to consider the influence of other factors such as reward systems and leadership style on KS among hotel employees. Besides, comparing our findings with other studies that could be applied in different geographical areas can give more reliable implications.

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" تقييم اتجاه وسلوك مشاركة المعرفة لدى العاملين بالفنادق: منظور سمات الشخصية "

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الملخص العربى

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد العلاقة بين السمات الشخصية لموظفى الفنادق واتجاه وسلوك مشاركتهم المعرفة وذلك بالتطبيق على فنادق الخمس نجوم فى القاهرة. تم تصميم استمارة استقصاء وتوزيعها على 368 من الموظفين. أوضحت نتائج الدراسة ارتفاع مستوى إدراك الموظفين لاتجاه وسلوك مشاركه المعرفة فيما بينهم حيث بلغ متوسط الإدراك (4,17 ، 4،4) على الترتيب. كما أشارت النتائج إلى وجود علاقة معنوية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين اتجاه وسلوك موظفي الفنادق لمشاركة المعرفة وبعض السمات الشخصية مثل يقظة الضمير (Conscientiousness)والقبولية (Agreeableness) إذ كان معامل الارتباط مع القبولية لاتجاه مشاركة المعرفة ر=0,29 ، سلوك مشاركة المعرفة ر =0,43 بينما بلغ معامل الارتباط مع يقظة الضمير إلى اتجاه مشاركة المعرفة ر=0,30 ، سلوك مشاركة المعرفة ر =0,49، وهناك علاقة معنويه ذات دلالة إحصائية بين سلوك موظفي الفندق والانفتاح على الخبرة (Openness to Experience) بمعامل ارتباط ر= 0,30 بدرجه معنوية ($\alpha > 0,05$). هذه النتائج يمكن أن تساعد على وضع استراتيجيات محددة لتحسين نظم إدارة المعرفة وإسناد صحيح الأدوار المختلفة لموظفي الفنادق، كما تساعد المدراء فى التعرف على أهمية السمات الشخصية وتبادل المعرفة عند انتخاب وتوظيف العاملين الجدد ذلك أن معاملات الارتباط تؤكد عدم معنويه بعض السمات الشخصية مع مشاركة المعرفة للموظفين فيما بينهم، مما يؤكد على أهمية العمل الفندقى وفقا للمعايير والاستراتيجيات الموضوعة من قبل إدارة الفنادق ليضمن بذلك مستوى الخدمة المقدمة للعملاء.

الكلمات الدالة: مشاركة المعرفة، السمات الشخصيه، صناعة الفنادق.